THE MYTH OF THE PENT CUCKOO

A STUDY IN FOLKLORE

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THE SWYNCOMBE CUCKOO PEN
FROM THE NORTH.

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BY

JOHN EDWARD FIELD, M.A.

VICAR OF BENSON

"Listen to these wild traditions,

* * *

Ye who love a nation's legends,
Love the ballads of a people,
That like voices from afar off
Call to us to pause and listen.

LONGFELLOW

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PREFACE

The first purpose of this work includes a scientific enquiry into the meaning and value of the widespread story of the men who pent, or hedged in, the Cuckoo, which appears in the old "*Tales of the Wise Men of Gotham*" and is also familiar in several parts of the country at the present day.

Its further purpose is to give an account of a series of sites bearing the traditional name of "Cuckoo Pens" along the southern part of the Chiltern Hills and in the neighbouring districts. Fifteen such sites are known to me, and although I have made frequent enquiries I have not been able to hear of another; but probably there are several more. A description of each of the fifteen is given with more or less detail. In the majority of cases this is done from personal inspection. In the other cases it is from accounts contributed by friends, and to these I desire to offer an expression of thanks. As far as I have had opportunity of observing, the Cuckoo Pens do not appear in Tithe Awards or Enclosure Awards, but the designation survives only in popular parlance. Sometimes it has passed out of the knowledge of the villagers generally and is only handed down by those

who are connected with the particular spot of ground. In one instance, where it was well known a quarter of a century ago, it is difficult to trace any recollection of it now. But in two instances I have seen it noted in the prospectus of a sale of land.

Mr. G. D. Leslie, R.A., in his *Riverside Letters* (ix. p. 68) describes the downs which jut out like promontories from the flanks of the Chilterns into the plains below.

> The tops of these jutting spurs are more or less devoid of wood, though most of them are dotted about with juniper bushes, and some have on their summits isolated clumps of trees which are in this part of the country called "Cuckoo Pens." I suppose pen means a hill or peak, but how cuckoo comes in I know not.

And Mr. A. D. Godley, in *Oxford Country*, referring to this passage, suggests that the name must be identical with that of a prominent hill on the Berkshire ridge surmounted by a lofty mound and known as Cuckhamslow (Cwichelms-hlæw) or Scutchamfly Knob. It suffices to reply that Cwichelm the son of Cynegils was under-king in Berkshire and would not be likely to leave his name on several spots in Oxfordshire. But the Cuckoo Pens, like Cuckhamslow, are marked in most cases by some object of antiquarian interest which will merit particular notice.

Of all the tales which the folklore of our country has handed down, the Cuckoo myth is certainly one of the most curious and interesting. And the district

of the Cuckoo Pens is full of associations which have an attractive charm to the tourist and the holiday-maker, as well as abundant interest to the historian and the antiquary. It is hoped, therefore, that both the general reader and the student may find in this work something that deserves attention. The subject would have been worthy of a technical treatise for the study of antiquarian readers; but it has seemed desirable to treat it in a popular way, and to introduce historical notes and a variety of illustrative matter, in the hope that this may commend it to the wider circle of readers who care for the old tales and legends of our land and for objects of general interest in its antiquities.

Books from which materials have been drawn are named as occasion requires. But special mention must be made here of two works to which I am largely indebted. One of these is *All about the Merry Tales of Gotham*, by Mr. Alfred Stapleton of Nottingham, where some of my conclusions were anticipated. The other is the Rev. Edmund McClure's *British Place-Names in their Historical Setting*.

The substance of my account of the Medlers Bank at Benson has appeared in the *Berks, Bucks and Oxon Archæological Journal*, ii. 45-50 (1896).

J. E. F.

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THE MYTH OF THE PENT CUCKOO

CHAPTER I

THE WISE MEN OF GOTHAM

One of the most popular chap-books which amused our forefathers was a series of twenty short stories bearing the title of *The Merry Tales of the Wise Men of Gotham;* the name of the place being sometimes written, as it is pronounced, "Gottam." Among them "The Third Tale" runs as follows:

"On a time the men of Gottam would have pinned in the Cuckoo, whereby shee should sing all the yeere, and in the midst of the town they made a hedge round in compasse, and they had got a Cuckoo, and had put her into it, and said, Sing here all the yeere, and thou shalt lacke neither meat nor drinke. The Cuckoo as soone as she perceived her selfe incompassed within the hedge, flew away. A vengeance on her said they, We made not our hedge high enough."

This extract is taken from a curious little black-letter copy in the Bodleian Library, which is the oldest now forthcoming. It is entitled "The Merry

Tales of the Mad-men of Gottam. Gathered together by A. B. of Physicke Doctor. Printed at London by B. A. and T. F. for Michael Sparke, dwelling in Greene Arbor at the sign of the Blue Bible, 1630." The compiler to whom this title attributes the collection is Andrew Borde, of whom more must be said; and the printers are Bernard Alsop and Thomas Fawcet. But we shall find numerous proofs, presently to be noticed, showing that the collection had already been current for a century before the date of this edition. It has been frequently reprinted in recent years, and it will be sufficient for our present purpose to give a few of the principal tales and a general sketch of the remainder, for the sake of such light as they may throw upon the one with which we are principally concerned, and also for the sake of illustrating the date and history of the very eccentric compilation.

The twenty tales, with one or two exceptions, agree in attributing extraordinary stupidity to the men of Gotham, and while some of them are sufficiently amusing the wit of others is feeble and pointless. The following is "The First Tale."

"There was two men of Gottam, and the one of them was going to the market to Nottingham to buy sheepe, and the other came from the market: and both met together upon Nottingham-bridge: Well met, said the one to the other: Whither be yee going? said he that came from Nottingham. Marry, said he that was going thither, I go to the market to buy sheepe. Buy sheepe, said the other, and which way

wilt thou bring them home? Marry, said the other, I will bring them over this bridge: By Robinhood, said he that came from Nottingham, but thou shalt not. By Maidmarrian, said he that was going thitherward, but I will. Thou shalt not, said the one. I will, said the other. Ter here, said the one: Shue there, said the other. Then they beate their staves against the ground, one against the other, as there had beene an hundred sheepe betwixt them. Hold in, said the one. Beware the leaping over the bridge of sheepe, said the other. I care not, said the other; they shall not come this way, said the one: But they shall, said the other. . . And as they were at their contention, another man of Gottam came from the market with a sack of meale upon a horse, and seeing and hearing his neighbours at strife for sheepe and none betwixt them, said, Ah fooles, will you never learn wit? Helpe me, said he that had the meale, and lay my sacke upon my shoulder; they did so. And he went to the one side of the bridge, and unloosed the mouth of the sacke, and did shake out all his meale into the River. Now neighbours, said the man, how much meale is there in my sacke now? Marry there is none at all, said they. Now by my faith, said he, even as much wit is in your two heads, to strive for that thing you have not. Which was the wisest of all these three persons, judge you?"

The Second Tale tells how "a man of Gottam did ride to the market with two bushells of wheate, and because his horse should not beare heavy, he carried

his corne upon his owne necke, and did ride upon his horse, because his horse should not carry to heavy a burthen."

The next is the Cuckoo tale, with which we began. The fourth also is distinctly humorous:

"There was a man of Gottam the which went to the market at Nottingham to sell cheese, and as he was going downe the hill to Nottingham-bridge one of his cheese did fall out of his wallet and ran downe the hill. Said the fellow, can you run to the market alone? I will send the one after the other of you. Then he layd downe his wallet and tooke the cheeses and did tumble them downe the hill one after another, and some ran into one bushe and some into another. And at the last he said, I charge you all to meet me in the Market-place. And when the fellow came into the Market-place to meet his cheeses he stayed there till the market was almost done. Then he went about and did enquire of his neighbors and other men, if they did see his cheeses come to the market? Who should bring them, said one of the market-men? Marry themselves, said the fellow, they knew the way well enough. He said, a vengeance on them all, I did feare to see my cheeses run so fast, that they would run beyond the market: I am now fully perswaded that they bee now almost at Yorke. Whereupon he forthwith hired a horse to ride to Yorke to seeke his Cheeses, where they were not. But to this day no man could tell him of his cheeses."

"The Fift Tale" also is worth transcribing:

"There was a man of Gottam, who bought at Nottingham a Trevet or Brandyron, and as he was going home his shoulders grew sore with the cariage thereof, and he set it downe, and seeing that it had three feet, said, hast thou three feet and I but two? Thou shalt beare me home if thou wilt, and so set it downe on the ground, and set himself downe thereupon, and said to the Trevet, beare me as long as I have borne thee, for if thou doe not thou shalt stand still for me. The man of Gottam did see that his Trevet would not goe further, Stand still, said he, in the Mare's [Mayor's] name and follow me if thou wilt, I will tell thee the right way to my Home. When he did come to his house, his wife said, where is my Trevet? The man said, he hath three legs and I have but two, and I did teach him the way to my house, let him come home if he will. Where left ye the Trevet, said the wife? At Gottam hill, said the man. The wife did runne and fetch home the Trevet her owne selfe, or else she had lost it through her husbands wit."

"The Sixth Tale" is of a smith that "had a waspes nest in the straw in the end of his Forge," and set fire to the straw because a man was stung when he brought his horse to be shod.

"The Seaventh Tale" has some points of special interest to which we shall have occasion to make further reference:

"When that good-Friday was come, the men of Gottam did cast their heads together what to do with their white Herring, their red Herring, their

Sprats and salt Fish. One consulted with the other, and agreed that such fish should be cast into their Pond or poole (the whiche was in the middle of the Towne) that it might increase against the next yeere, and every man that had any Fish left did cast them into the Poole. The one said, I have thus many white Herrings; another said, I have thus many Sprats; another said, I have thus many red Herrings: and the other said, I have thus many salt Fishes. Let all goe together into the Poole or Pond, and we shall fare like Lords the next Lent: At the beginning of the next Lent following, the men did draw the Pond to have their Fish, and there was nothing but a great Eele. Ah said they all, a mischeife on this Eele, for he hath eate up all our Fish. What shall we do with him, said the one to the other? Kill him, said the one of them, Chop him all to pieces, said another. Nay, not so, said the other, Let us drowne him: be it so, said all. They went to another Poole or Pond by, and did cast in the Eele into the water. Lye there, said they and shift for thyselfe, for no helpe thou shalt have of us. And there they left the Eele to be drowned."

The Eighth Tale relates that the men of Gottam had forgotten to pay their rent, and pay-day was on the morrow; they feared that it would not reach their landlord in time; but one of them said that he had taken a hare, "and he shall carry it, for he is very quickfooted"; to which they all agreed: and they wrote a letter and put the money in a purse and tied them about the hare's neck, saying, "First

thou must go to Loughborow, and then to Leicester, and at Newark there is our Lord, and commend us to him, and there is his dutie." [This Newark is not the town of that name, but the "new wark" which the earls of Leicester added to their castle in the earlier half of the fourteenth century, and in which they resided; and the village of Gotham was a dependency of the honour of Leicester at that period.] The hare, however, "did run a cleane contrary way." Some cried to him to go to Loughborough first; "some said, Let the hare alone, hee can tell a nearer way then the best of us all doe, let him goe: another said, it is a subtle Hare, let her alone, she will not keepe the highway for feare of dogs."

The Ninth Tale will hardly bear abbreviation:

"On a time there was one of Gottam was a mowing in the meads and found a great Grashopper: he cast downe his sithe and did run home to his neighbours and said that there was a Divell in the field that hopped in the grasse: then there was every man ready with Clubs and Staves with Halberts and other weapons to goe and kill the Grashopper: when they did come to the place where the Grashopper should be, said the one to the other, let every man crosse himselfe from the Divell, or we will not meddle with him. And so they returned againe, and said, we were well blessed this day that we went no further. Ah cowards, said he that had the Sithe in the mead. Helpe me to fetch my Sithe: no, said they, it is good to sleepe in a whole skin, better it is to loose the sithe than to marre us all."

In the Tenth Tale, twelve men of Gotham went fishing; some waded in the water, others stayed on land. Afterwards "they told themselves and every man did tell eleven, and the twelfth man did never tell himselfe. Alas, said the one to the other, there is some one of us drowned. They went backe to the brooke where they had been fishing and sought up and down for him that was drowned and did make great lamentation. A Courtier did come riding by and he did ask what it was they did seeke and why they were so sorry." When they had told him, "Well, said the Courtier, what will you give me and I will finde out twelve men? Sir, said they, all the money that we have. Give me the money, said the Courtier: and hee began with the first and did give him a recombendibus over the shoulders that he groaned, and said, there is one: so he served all."

The Eleventh Tale describes a man of Gotham riding from Nottingham and attempting to pick up with his sword a cheese that lay by the wayside, but his sword was too short, and he rode back to Nottingham to buy a longer one; while in the meantime another rider had dismounted and carried the cheese away.

The remaining tales are the least interesting of the series. Most of them are of a different character from the first eleven; for instead of attributing foolish actions to the Gothamites, they merely relate certain jests more or less humorous, and some, it must be added, more or less coarse, which were made by them. Two of them are the familiar stories in the

one case of the "Gossips," or sponsors, at a baptism, and in the other case of the bridegroom at a marriage, being admonished that they must repeat certain things after the priest and persisting in saying after him every remark that he had occasion to make and every question that he asked of them, until in the one case the priest was compelled to provide new godfathers and godmothers and in the other case to defer the marriage until the man could be better instructed.

In the Fourteenth Tale a man of Gotham invited "four or five gentlemen's servants" to eat a bustard which he had caught, but in the meantime his wife with "two of her gossips" ate it and served up for the husband and his guests an old goose, which the host strenuously affirmed to be a bustard; and he shook out the goose's feathers from a bag to prove it; whereupon he received for his reward a dozen stripes with a "waster" or cudgel.

The Fifteenth Tale tells of a young man of Gotham who was advised by his mother to "cast a sheep's eye" at a fair maid whom he was wooing; and he went to the butcher and bought seven or eight sheep's eyes for the purpose.

The Nineteenth Tale demands notice because we learn from its introductory words that the compiler of the book was aware of the existence of other such tales which he did not include in it. It refers to the "old time when these aforesaid jests (as men of the country reported), and such fantastical matters were done at Gottam, which I cannot tell half." The

story is of the wives of Gotham being gathered together in an ale-house and relating to one another how they were profitable to their husbands. Nine of them describe their various plans, but a few examples will suffice. One declared that she could neither bake, brew, nor work, and therefore she kept every day holiday and prayed for her husband at home, and when she could not go to church she went to the ale-house. Another made her household go to bed by daylight all the winter so that she might profit her husband by saving the candles. A third drank so much good ale that she cared for no meat and so saved the bread. Another went to the ale-house to save fires, and another washed her husband's clothes but once a year to save soap. Lastly, the ale-wife herself drank all her husband's ale lest it should get sour.

The Twentieth Tale is a very curious one.

"On Ashwednesday the Priest of Gottam would have a Collation [that is, a Conference, or Address] to his Parishioners, and said, Friends, the time is come that you must use prayer and fasting and almesdeedes, and this weeke come you to shrift, and I will tell you more of my mind, for as for prayers, I think there bee not two persons in the Parish can say halfe their Pater-noster. As for fasting, you fast still: for you have not a good meales meate through the whole yeere. As for almesdeedes, what should you do to give any thing, that have nothing to take to? But when that you come to shrift, I will tell you more of my mind after Masse. The good man

that did keepe the Ale-house did come to shrift, and above all things he confessed himselfe to be drunke divers times in the yeere, specially in Lent. The Priest said, in Lent thou shouldest most refraine from drunkennesse and abstaine from drinke. Not so, said the fellow, for it is an old Proverbe, that fish must swim. Yea, said the Priest, it must swim in water: I cry you mercy, quoth the fellow, I thought it should have swom in good Ale. So one after another the men of Gottam did come to shrift, and when they were shriven, the priest said, I cannot tell what penance to give you. If I should enjoyne you to prayer, there is none of you that can say your Pater noster, and you be now too old to learne. And to enjoyne you to fast, it were but foolishnesse, for you doe not eate a good meales meat in a yeere, wherefore I doe enjoyne thee to labour well all the weeke, that thou maist fare well to dinner on the Sun-dayes, and I will come to dinner and see it be so and take part: Another man he did enjoyne to fare well on Munday and another the Teusday, and one after another, that one or other should fare well once a weeke, that he might have part of meat. And as for almes-deedes the Priest said: You be but beggers all, except it be one or two, therefore bestow your almes on your selves."

CHAPTER II

ANTIQUITY OF THE GOTHAM TALES

Several interesting questions arise in connection with the Tales of the Wise Men of Gotham. The first that naturally occurs is the question when they were compiled. The antiquity of the collection as a whole appears at once in the social customs and religious observances which are prominent in many of them, though not actually in the Cuckoo story. The allusions to the *Pater Noster* and the Mass, the coming to shrift and the penance, in the last tale; the demand, in the ninth, that each man should "crosse himselfe from the Divell" before he could venture to meddle with him; the quaint story of the herrings and sprats and salt fish which remained at the end of Lent and were to be kept for the next Lent, as told in the seventh tale; all these are points which could not have appeared in popular stories written after the reign of Henry VIII. And the external evidence shows that they were collected at this period in the form in which they have come down to us.

No copy is known to exist of earlier date than that of 1630, which has been described already. But Anthony à Wood in his *Athenæ Oxonienses*, written

at the close of the seventeenth century, says that these tales were "printed at London in the time of King Henry VIII." Mr. Halliwell, who reprinted the series in 1840, mentions a copy of an edition issued at the beginning of Queen Elizabeth's reign, and Mr. Carew-Hazlitt records others of the earlier part of the seventeenth century. Editions of a later date were published not only in London but in several provincial towns, as Newark, Coventry, Hull, Edinburgh, Glasgow, and also in New York. One was printed at Stirling as lately as 1829. It is a remarkable fact that only eleven years after the chap-book was last printed for the amusement of the populace it was reprinted in London as a literary curiosity. "The earlier impressions seem to have perished," says Mr. Carew-Hazlitt, who has included the tales in his volumes of Shakespeare Jest Books, and he adds, "When the excessive popularity of such a piece is considered, we can hardly wonder that all trace of the book in its original shape should have been lost." It was edited anew in 1900 by Mr. Arthur Stapleton of Nottingham, with a variety of illustrative matter.

The first known allusion to the "fools of Gotham" occurs in the earliest collection of miracle-plays that has come down to us, known as the *Towneley Mysteries*. They are contained in a manuscript which is believed to have belonged to Widkirk Abbey in Yorkshire and was written not later than the middle of the fifteenth century. A facsimile of the passage is given by Mr. Stapleton as a frontis-

piece to his volume. The play represents the Adoration of the Shepherds at the Birth of Christ. The first shepherd is soliloquising upon the uncertainty of life and likening it to the variableness of the weather, and the second shepherd enters and quarrels with him; whereupon "Jak Garcio" (a *garçon*) appears on the scene and parts them. He exclaims:

> Now God gyf you care: foles al sam.
> Sagh I never none so fare: bot the foles of Gotham.
> Wo is hir that yow bare: youre syre and youre dam.
> had been well
> Had she broght furth an hare: a shepe or a lam.

Or in modern English:

> Now God give care to you, fools all together!
> Saw I never none go thus but the fools of Gotham.
> Woe is her that bare you, your sire and your dam.
> It had been well
> Had she brought forth a hare, a sheep, or a lamb.

Another early allusion, cited in Collier's *History of Dramatic Poetry*, is in the *Comedy of Misogonus* which was produced about the year 1560, where Cacurgus, or the Mischief-Maker, who is the domestic fool of the family, cries: "Ha ha ha ha ha, I must neds laughe in my slefe: the wise men of Gotum are risen againe."

The author of *Philotimus*, in 1583, is quoted as proving that he knew the collection of stories in the familiar chap-book half a century before the date of the earliest edition that we now possess; for he alludes to the men of Gotam tying their rents in a purse about the hare's neck, as we have it in the

Eighth Tale. Collier gives us also a comedy entitled *A Knack to know a Knave*, by Will Kemp, who was famous as a player in the reign of Elizabeth. It had already been performed for a few years when it was first printed in 1594; and it is the more interesting because it calls them the "mad men of Goteham" (not the "wise men"), and therefore it is evidently based upon the chap-book of stories, affording an additional proof that this was well known at least forty years before the date of the oldest edition that survives. It also illustrates the great popularity of the tales at that period; for though the "merriment," or burlesque, "of the Men of Goteham" is only one brief scene in the play, it appears on the title-page as if it were the chief substance of it. Moreover, it connects the tales with the visit of a King to Gotham, to which we shall have occasion to refer hereafter.

There is a quaint allusion in *The Accedence of Armorie* by Gerard Leigh, published in 1597, the first English book upon the subject of blazoning arms:

"Gentlemen should not suffer Little John or Much the Miller's sonne to be araied in cotes of armes, as I have seene some wear at Whitsontide in May-pole mirth, which have bin pulled downe and given to them, by the Churchwardens of Gotham. Whoe, not onelie by a long deliberate doubt, drowned an Eele, but by advise of John of the same towne banished a snaile: which deed done, he was demanded of the townes-men what it was: quod John, it is either something or nothing. None doo more hurt to the

memory of your auncestors then such or such like of whom it greeveth me to tell of."

Here the banishment of a snail is added to the drowning of the eel. And we have seen how the chap-book itself acknowledges that it does not contain by any means all the tales that were told about the men of Gotham. Mr. Hazlitt mentions an additional series which appeared in 1637, under the title of *The Second Part of the Wise Men of Gotham*, but nothing is known of its contents. Numerous stories, however, have been collected by different writers. Mr. Stapleton, for instance, gives us several. The men of Gotham chained a wheelbarrow which a mad dog had bitten, lest it should bite others. They hauled a cow to the roof of a house to eat off a growth of vegetation, and when the rope round her neck was throttling her they thought that her dying groans showed the delight with which she regarded the prospect of this pasture. Two brothers quarrelled about the pasturage of their oxen, one of them wishing to have as many oxen as he could see stars and the other wishing to have pasturage as wide as the firmament; and they fought about it till each killed the other. A woman of Gotham was enjoined by her husband to wet the meal before she gave it to the pigs, and she carried out his directions by throwing the meal into the well and then throwing the pigs in afterwards. Another woman was going to market with her husband, and on the way he asked her whether she had pulled the door after her when she left the house; finding she had forgotten

it, he sent her back to do so; and as he waited for her return he presently saw her toiling towards him and with a strong rope pulling the door after her along the road.

Mr. Halliwell also has brought together a variety of similar stories, most of them equally foolish; but some are of interest because of their great antiquity. For example: Some of the Gothamites were walking by a river where cross-currents caused the water to boil as in a whirlpool, and they brought a quantity of oatmeal, for it seemed an opportunity for making enough hasty porridge to serve the village for a month: but after they had thrown the oatmeal in, how should they know when it was ready? One was to jump in and report upon it; but the water was deeper than he had expected; thrice he rose, and said nothing; they supposed he meant that the porridge was good; they jumped in eagerly to get possession of it, and all were drowned.

Another tale is that they found a hedgehog in the fields, and when none could tell what animal it was they "declared it to be one of those which Adam had never named." There is the story also which takes the form of a nursery rhyme:

> Three wise men of Gotham
> Went to sea in a bowl;
> And if the bowl had been stronger
> My tale had been longer.

Again, the Gothamites had only one knife among them, and they stuck it in a tree in the middle of the village where all might use it, but the con-

sequent disputes were troublesome. This seems to carry us back to very early days, when the usual place of meeting for public business in each little tribal community was a tree in the middle of the village; just as still in some remote places the tradition of it has been preserved in a tree where public notices are posted, sometimes with a rustic seat around it, and sometimes crowning the burial-mound of an ancient chieftain. The common knife of the primitive villages might fitly be entrusted to the custody of the tree in the middle of the village with which so many public interests were connected and which even bore a certain note of sanctity.

In another tale one of the men of Gotham was abroad one night when the rest were in bed, and seeing the moon's reflection in the horse pond of the village he thought it was green cheese, and roused all his neighbours from their slumbers that they might help him to draw it out, with a view, it would seem, to a nocturnal feast upon the cheese. The very absurdity of the story suggests the thought that it must have had some meaning which is lost; and it is certainly possible that it may embody some reminiscence of primitive moon-worship and the midnight orgies that went with it. At any rate, the joke of the moon's reflection being mistaken for a cheese, and of fools attempting to get it from the water, is a tale of very old times. It appears, for example, in ancient Arabian fables; and we find it in a collection of such fables quaintly compiled as a treatise on Clerical Discipline by Petrus Alphonsus,

a Jew who became a Christian, with King Alphonsus I. of Arragon for his godfather, in the early years of the twelfth century, and whose work was popular enough to be translated from the Latin into more than one French version. In another form of the story the actual moon in the sky is the cheese, as we shall presently meet with it in the tales told of Lorbottle in Northumberland. And thus again we have it in the nursery rhyme of "The Three Jovial Huntsmen":

> And all the night they hunted,
> And nothing could they find
> But the moon a-gliding,
> A-gliding with the wind.
> One said it was the moon,
> The other said nay;
> The third said it was a cheese
> And half o't cut away.

It is evident, therefore, that these stories had their several beginnings in various ages and were not originally connected either with Gotham or with any other single locality. The chap-book of the twenty Gotham Tales is no doubt a collection of such miscellaneous stories as came in the compiler's way, and very likely some of them were of his own invention. Knowing the old tradition that the men of Gotham achieved some supremely ridiculous action, an ingenious story-teller published his collection of tales in which he attributed them all to the same people, so that eventually, when the collection had caught the popular fancy, the "Wise Men of Gotham" were credited with every odd absurdity that could be devised.

In all probability, as we shall have occasion to see, the one foundation-story around which all the rest were made to hang was the Penning of the Cuckoo. Certainly that story is the general favourite of the series. Its subject forms the frontispiece of the old copy of 1630, where a woodcut upon the title-page depicts an enclosure of hurdles, or railings, in which on one side is a countryman dressed in tall hat, open doublet, trunk-hose and shoes, and armed with a hooked staff, and on the other side is a bird seated upon a tree, while labels issuing from their mouths represent the man as exclaiming *Coocou*, and the bird, *Gotam*. Similar devices adorn the title-pages of most of the old editions, and some of these are reproduced by Mr. Stapleton, in each of which the man and the bird are surrounded by a circular wattled enclosure.

The story appears in a variety of forms. One account is that the men of Gotham had often heard the cuckoo but had never seen her, and therefore hedged in a bush from whence her note seemed to come, in the hope of catching her. Another account tells of their joining their hands round the bush to shut her in. In another, they threw up a circular bank of earth around the bush; and this is a form of the story which we shall have occasion to notice further in attempting to trace out the origin of it.

The frequent allusions in old writers show that the Cuckoo story was very widely current. We find it, for instance, in George Wither, the Puritan poet who published in 1613 his satirical verses, en-

titled *Abuses Stript and Whipt*, and was imprisoned for it, and afterwards sold his patrimony to raise a troop of soldiers for the Parliament. In the Seventh Satire of the First Book, "Of Jealousie," he has these lines:

> But this is true, to seek for to restraine
> A woman's will, is labour spent in vaine;
> And he that tries to doe it, might have bin
> One of the crew that hedg'd the Cuckoo in.

And Fulke Greville, Philip Sidney's friend, the Elizabethan soldier-poet whom James I. created Baron Brooke, writes in one of his sonnets:

> If doubt doe darken things held deare,
> Then well-fare nothing once a yeare;
> For many runne, but one must winne,
> Fooles only hedge the Cuckoe in.

There is also a curious satirical brochure composed by Laud in 1613, when he was President of St. John's College in Oxford. It was never published, but Mr. Stapleton gives portions of it which have been printed in *Notes and Queries*. The occasion of it was an outbreak in the University originating from a foolish controversy; some members having objected to the undignified custom of the Vice-Chancellor and Doctors taking their places in the Convocation House bareheaded; and when the quarrel grew so serious that it was proposed to repeat the experiment of an older period and found a college at Stamford, the future archbishop bethought him of bringing contempt upon it by his ridicule. He therefore described the proposed foundation of Gotham College, and its charter of

liberties, in which leave is granted to the Fellows that they "may remove Cuckoo Bush and set it in some part of the College garden, and that in remembrance of their famous predecessors they shall breed a Cuckoo every year and keep him in a pound till he be hoarse, and then in midsummer moon deliver him to the bush and set him at liberty." Drowned eel was to be part of their fare on fish-days, and cheese "of the same dairy with that cheese which their wise predecessors rolled down the hill to go to market before them." For exercise they were allowed "no walking in the summer but to look for birds' nests, especially the cuckoo"; their elections were "to be at cuckoo-time," and they must swear by nothing but "by the cuckoo" or "by the swine that taught Minerva." To the headship of the College the rectory of Gotam is to be annexed.

Thus "Wise Men of Gotham" became a proverbial title for any who were to be charged with folly; and Mr. Stapleton quotes, as the most eminent illustration of this, the fact that when Washington Irving caricatured the wisdom of the people of New York he called the city by the satirical name of Gotham, which has since become recognised as specially belonging to it.

When the art of printing became more general, a good many collections of tales, of a similar character to the very popular Gotham Tales, appeared. Mr. Carew-Hazlitt's volumes contain reprints of several jest-books which are supposed to have been used by Shakespeare, and of which the original copies are

very rare. The collection of *The Hundred Mery Tales*, published in 1526, exists only in a single copy preserved in the Royal Library at Göttingen; and the first of the Gotham Tales, of the three wise men quarrelling about the sheep on Nottingham Bridge, is included also, in a slightly varied form, among the hundred; but no doubt both collections took it from an earlier source. Other collections, which followed soon after the beginning of Queen Elizabeth's reign, are the *Mery Tales and Quicke Answers*, and the *Merie Tales of Skelton, Poet Lauriat.* Another favourite set was the Jests of Scogin, which have been attributed to Andrew Borde, the reputed editor of the Gotham Tales; but none of these ever rivalled that famous series in its wide popularity.

If we go back to older days, a comparison suggests itself between the Gotham Tales and the equally popular and somewhat similar collection of Æsop's Fables. Æsop is said to have visited Athens at the time when the people were oppressed by the usurpation of the despot Pisistratus in the sixth century before the Christian era, and he tried to raise their spirits by giving them the fable of the Frogs who petitioned Jupiter for a King; the god thereupon dropped a wooden log into the pond, and at first they fled in alarm at the splash; but soon discovering that their King was motionless they came back and sat upon him, and then begged Jupiter for another; but he was angry and sent them a stork, or in another version a water-serpent, which seized them and devoured them. Afterwards Æsop

came to Delphi, where he so greatly annoyed the people that they condemned him to death; and while they led him to the precipice from which he was to be thrown down, he warned them that his death would be avenged, telling them the fable of the eagle who laid her eggs on Jupiter's lap for safety, but a hornet startled the god and made him drop them. One or two more such stories are also attributed to Æsop; and these became the nucleus to which others were added from time to time—the Dog in the Manger, the Fox and the Grapes, the Hare and the Tortoise, and many more, until in the course of centuries upwards of two hundred of such fables were grouped together under Æsop's name, and collections of them were often called Ysopets. Each of these stories is of course intended to point a moral. But the Gotham Tales are mere jests; and whatever point of interest any of them may have had in their origin, they are put together for no other purpose than to provoke a smile.

CHAPTER III

GOTHAM IN NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

THE Gotham Tales, in the form in which the popular chap-book gives them, are connected with a village of that name near the south-west corner of Nottinghamshire. The proverb, "As wise as a man of Gotham," is quoted by the famous collector of old stories, Thomas Fuller, in the Nottinghamshire section of his *Worthies of England*, published in 1662, where he explains that "It passeth publickly for the Periphrasis of a Fool, and an hundred Fopperies are feigned and fathered on the Town-folk of Gotham, a Village in this County."

Gotham stands in an isolated position, some two miles from any other village and about midway between Nottingham and Loughborough. The Wolds rise to a considerable height on the west of it, and the broad marshes into which they drain spread eastward of it. Several of the tales allude to Nottingham as the market-town which the villagers frequented, and one of them implies that York was not very remote, while another mentions Loughborough and Leicester as towns in the neighbourhood; whence it is evident that the collection has

been adapted by a compiler who was acquainted with the district.

But some of the tales, as Mr. Stapleton points out, are hardly consistent with such a place as Gotham. Town life is implied in the story which tells of "four or five gentlemen's servants" being invited to a dinner, and in that which alludes to a butcher's shop where several sheep's heads were ready at hand, and in others which speak of considerable households where provisions were plentiful. Nor can we suppose that the lord of the castle was the person at whom the ridicule of the Eleventh Tale was aimed; yet there could hardly be a second man of Gotham who would carry a sword at his side when he rode to Nottingham. The parish priest, too, in the last tale, is a needy man, contriving to invite himself to a constant succession of meals with his humbler parishoners, whereas the rectory of Gotham was well endowed. And in the Cuckoo story itself there is an inconsistency, for it relates that the bird was hedged round "in the midst of the town," whereas the spot at Gotham known as the Cuckoo Bush is some distance outside the village.

According to a little publication of the year 1751, entitled *England's Gazeteer*, this village of Gotham is "noted for nothing so much as the ridiculous fable of the *wise men* here, who, 'tis said, went about to *hedge in a cuckow*. What original it had does not appear, though at Court Hill in this place there is a bush called Cuckow Bush." The fable, as we shall find, is connected with several other localities, but

for ages past it has been best known in connection with this village.

The name of the place should be observed Gotham is Gote-ham (not Go-tham), and is sometimes written thus in old times, and also Gottam. In the oldest documents we find its Saxon forms, Gat-ham, a goat-home, or Gata-ham, home of goats. In one of the old chap-books of the Tales a woodcut of a man riding upon a goat adorns the title-page. It is quite possible that the custom of calling a person derisively a "goat" comes from the traditional character of the men of Gotham, and that the similar use of the term "cuckoo" comes from this Gotham story.

The villagers are by no means ashamed of the story; for one of their two hostelries bears, and has borne from old times, the sign of the Cuckoo Bush, its front adorned with a picture of the bird perched on the foliage of a tree while some labourers are planting a hedge round it and others carry more boughs towards it and one in the foreground lops a bough from another tree with his axe. On the back of the sign-board the bird is the central figure, seated on her branch, with her beak wide open to utter the familiar cry. Sketches of this sign-board are given in Mr. Stapleton's volume.

Court Hill is a ridge of high ground rising steeply to a conspicuous eminence about half a mile south of the village of Gotham. From it there is a very wide view across the valley, and at the foot of it are gypsum mines which provide the principal occupa-

tion of the villagers and which in former days supplied the material for the plaster floors and ceilings of Nottingham and the neighbourhood. On the summit of this hill is "Cuckoo Bush Field," with a plantation of trees and some scattered gorse-bushes, now enclosed as a game-preserve and abounding in rabbits. The particular point to which the designation of Cuckoo Bush properly belongs is in the south-east angle of the spinney. It is a low but well-marked tumulus, raised upon the crown of the hill and surrounded by a shallow trench, the space enclosed being more than twenty yards across. Running ivy spreads over it, and there are a few straggling trees—an oak, a beech and a sycamore—with a tall ash-tree standing on the centre. It is in an angle of two ancient tracks, one of which runs along the ridge of the hill, and the other crossing the hill carries on the direct line of the high road which runs southward from Nottingham and which now has only a diverging course south-eastward from Gotham. The ash-tree on the tumulus is known as the Cuckoo Bush, and allusions to it are found at least as far back as the early years of the seventeenth century. It is said that the existing tree was planted about half a century ago in place of another which had been killed by the thousands of names scored upon its bark. But in former times there was a group of trees upon the mound. It seems sufficiently evident that the mound was a barrow beneath which some hero of old time was buried, though it has been thought that possibly it

had some military purpose; and Mr. Stapleton records the interesting fact that the villager who told him the story spoke of the Cuckoo not as being fenced in with a hedge, as it is commonly told, but as being *banked* with a circular mound of earth.

Upon the same ridge of hill, and a quarter of a mile along the old track-way to the east of the Cuckoo Bush, are the remains of an entrenchment known as "Crow Wood Mot." This *mot* is explained by a tradition, preserved by Thoroton the historian of Nottinghamshire, that the Saxon moot or court of the Hundred was held here; whence also the hill gets its name of Court Hill. Something must be said hereafter about the word *crow;* for it occurs frequently in the names of places of primitive importance. And again a little further east and at the foot of the ridge there is yet another interesting earthwork. The villagers have a tradition that it was the site of Rushcliffe Hall, and that the family of St. Andrew, who were the owners of Gotham, had a manor house here. In Domesday Book it is Risecliff, which in plain English is "Hill-cliff"; and its ancient importance is shown by the fact that it gives its name to the wapentake of Rushcliff, one of the six into which the county of Nottingham is divided. Mr. Stapleton compares the village of Thurgarton, giving its name to another of the wapentakes of the county, and having a hill adjoining the Priory called Castle Hill, which is pronounced to be the site of a British or Roman camp and was afterwards the meeting-place of the folk-moot. This so-called site

of Rushcliff Hall is a rectangular enclosure of about a hundred yards in length by fifty in breadth, protected by a large and fairly perfect moat more than twenty feet wide. Part of the moat is still supplied with water from springs in the hillside above it. From the fact that the area shows no traces of foundations it is inferred that whatever building once stood upon it must have been of timber only. It lies in a hollow of the hill-front, but the trees which formerly shaded it are cut down. It appears therefore that Risecliff and Court Hill are only two names of the same eminence of which a portion has come to be known more commonly as Cuckoo Bush Hill. Here are the trenches of a prehistoric "castle" above, and a moat below representing a manor house of Norman days; and here the court or folk-moot of the wapentake had its meeting-place. Golf-links have intruded themselves but have not materially affected the site.

The springs which the moat guarded were evidently important in early times; for the part of the hill where they rise is known as Welldon, the *well-dune*, or hill of the springs. The villagers seem to have used them from time immemorial, because the water of the valley was fouled by the gypsum and the decayed vegetation of the soil. Throsby, in his Additions to Thoroton's *History of Nottinghamshire*, in 1790, relates that he "saw asses, women and children, loaded with water," which they were carrying home across the marshy meadow-land. Under the Enclosure Award of 1804 the spring was

vested in the surveyor of highways, a footway was constructed between it and the village, and it was protected by an enclosing wall: afterwards pipes were laid for the conveyance of the water; and finally, in 1862, Earl Howe erected in the village a small brick building which is known as the Water House.

The traditional account of the origin of the stories is given by Throsby. It explains that King John was proposing to cross the broad meadows near this village on his way to Nottingham, but the inhabitants prevented him, in the belief that the way by which a King passed would become a public road thenceforward: whereupon the King sent some servants to inquire the reason of their incivility, with a view to imposing upon them some fine or other punishment. "The villagers, hearing of the approach of the King's servants, thought of an expedient to turn away His Majesty's displeasure from them. When the messengers arrived at Gotham, they found some of the inhabitants engaged in endeavouring to drown an eel in a pool of water; some were employed in dragging carts upon a large barn to shade the wood from the sun; others were tumbling their cheeses down a hill, that they might find the way to Nottingham for sale; and some were employed in hedging in a cuckoo, which had perched upon an old bush where the present one now stands; in short, they were all employed in some foolish way or other, which convinced the King's servants that it was a village of fools."

There is nothing in the chap-book series of stories to connect them with the visit of a King; but the tradition is illustrated by the Elizabethan play, *A Knack to know a Knave*, to which allusion has already been made. It has a scene of grotesque buffoonery introducing "mad men of Goteham, to wit a miller, a cobbler, and a smith," the first of whom proposes, "Let us consult among ourselves how to misbehave ourselves to the King's worship, . . . and when he comes, to deliver him this petition." Presently the King enters, and the cobbler comes forward as spokesman:

> We, the townsmen of Goteham,
> Hearing your grace would come this way,
> Did think it good for you to stay,
> (But hear you, neighbours bid somebody ring the bells,)
> And we come to you alone
> To deliver our petition.

The King asks his attendant what the petition is, and bids him read. The attendant replies, "Nothing but to have a licence to brew strong ale thrice a week; and he that comes to Goteham and will not spend a penny on a pot of ale, if he be a-dry, that he may fast." Whereupon the King replies, "Well, sirs, we grant your petition"; and the cobbler, "We humbly thank your royal majesty." The author of the play, therefore, seems to have been familiar with such a story as Throsby has recorded of the King coming to Gotham and the "misbehaviour" of the village notables.

The spot on which King John was stopped by three farmers of Gotham is still pointed out near a

footpath which leads to the village from the east. It is marked by a mound which is now ploughed over and has almost disappeared; and this, they say, was thrown up to obstruct the King's progress. According to one account they chained the King and his chariot to a strong post which they planted in the centre of the mound. In another account the King had condemned the three farmers to be hanged before he found that they were merely fools. But the main points of the story are, first, that the villagers resisted the King's approach, and secondly, that he did not deem them worthy of punishment.

It is natural that King John should be the hero of the story, on account of his close connection with Nottingham. Before his accession, when he was attempting to usurp the throne during Cœur de Lion's absence in the East, his partisans fortified Nottingham Castle on his behalf; and after he became King this place was assaulted by the confederate barons who invited the Dauphin of France to dethrone him. He was probably the King who was best known in the traditions of the neighbouring villages. Hence the legend of any King either before him or after him may well have been handed down as a legend of King John.

Various suggested explanations of the story have been collected by Mr. Stapleton. It is said that King John was probably at Gotham in 1206, when he passed through Nottingham to Oakham; for the high road southward took this direction from Nottingham as late as the beginning of the eighteenth

century. One story is that he was intending to purchase a castle and lands at Gotham, and the people dreaded having so expensive a neighbour. Henry VII. is said to have encamped near the place in 1487 on his way to Stoke Field, near Newark, where he defeated the insurgent Earl of Lincoln who was espousing the cause of Lambert Simnel; and the memory of some slight offered to the King by partisans of the impostor may have been confused with memories of King John. Henry VIII., too, is said to have issued a commission to the magistrates of Gotham to prevent poaching, and this may have been treated as a subject of ridicule with a similar confusion of names.

Thomas Hearne, the Berkshire antiquary, believed that the entire series of the Gotham Tales arose from some obsolete legal tenures in the district, where lands were held by customs somewhat similar to those which the tales represent. Mr. Stapleton inclines to the belief that the tales were intended to ridicule the proceedings of the Hundred Court of Rushcliffe, more especially as they confine their ridicule to the men and say nothing of the women.

But going back behind all these theories, we may keep in mind the features of special interest which are still in existence at Gotham. These are, first, the prehistoric tumulus on the crown of the neighbouring hill where the villagers say that their forefathers hedged in or embanked the cuckoo; secondly, the entrenchment known as Crow Wood Mot; and thirdly, the quadrangular earthwork beside the

spring, at the foot of the hill half a mile away, where the Court of the Wapentake met; then the village itself, with its distinctly English name, in the neighbouring valley; and lastly, another prehistoric tumulus close beside the village, where some legendary king is said to have been stopped as he approached from the east and attempted to make his way across the meadows. When we put all this together there can be little doubt that the legends preserve a reminiscence of the time when the invading English captured the village and the Briton found his last place of refuge on the ridge of hills above.

CHAPTER IV

GOTHAM IN SUSSEX

THERE is a second Gotham, a manor in the parish of Hailsham in Sussex; near to which, also, in the parish of Westham adjoining Pevensey, is some land known as Gotham Marsh. We are assured in Lower's *Chronicles of Pevensey* that several of the Gotham Tales "are identical with those which are still traditionally preserved in the vicinity of Pevensey." Hence it has been suggested that the tales of the chap-book may have belonged to the Sussex Gotham in their origin and may have been adapted by the compiler to suit the Gotham near Nottingham. Moreover, the tale which speaks of the inhabitants having an abundant supply of herrings and sprats has been thought to fit a place near the sea rather than a remote inland village; though at Nottingham itself the Borough records show that four hundred years ago the mayor was required "to make due serche within the town in the week afore Lenton . . . for whyte heryng, red heryng, salt fyshe," etc. What is more to the point is an ancient custom, which is said to have prevailed at Pevensey, of putting criminals to death by drowning; and thus the story of the murderous eel and his punishment

acquires a special meaning at that place. But the story, as we shall see, is told of other places. It is noted also that the mayor of Pevensey was a person who figured prominently in the tales of that borough; for it was he that told a messenger to keep his hat on, "for though I am mayor of Pemsey, I am still but a man," and when another messenger found him thatching his pigstye and told him that he was reading upside-down the missive which was delivered to him, he bade the man hold his tongue, "for while I am mayor of Pemsey I will hold a letter which eend uppards I like;" and again it was he that received a royal proclamation against the illegal firing of beacons and at once apprehended a woman whom he found frying bacon; and he, with the whole municipal body of Pevensey, when a man was condemned to death for stealing a pair of leathern breeches, recommended that the verdict should be altered to manslaughter. But the mayor in the Gotham Tale whose authority was invoked by the owner of the trevet may have been either of Pevensey or of Nottingham.

It should be observed that Dr. Andrew Borde, to whom the authorship of the Tales has usually been attributed, was born, as he himself tells us, at "Boords Hill in Holms dayle," near Cuckfield; and there is reason to believe that he made his home at Pevensey, at no great distance from his birthplace, for it is at least certain that he had property there, since he bequeathed two houses at Pevensey in his will; and he is said to have been buried there.

The occasion which is supposed to have led Dr. Borde to write the Tales is related in Horsfield's *History of Lewes*. A commission was issued by King Henry VIII. in 1533 to John prior of Lewes, Richard abbot of Bayham, John prior of Michelham, Thomas lord Dacre, and others; and they met at Westham on the 3rd of October in that year, for the purpose of preventing unauthorised persons from taking fish within the privileges of the marsh of Pevensey. It is believed that the measure was unpopular and that the Gotham Tales were written to pour ridicule upon it, Gotham being the property of Lord Dacre and near his residence. According to this account the dignitaries who would enforce the law were the wise men who thought to drown an eel as a criminal because they believed him to have devoured the fish that surrounded him.

Andrew Borde is undoubtedly the "A. B. of Physicke Doctor" to whom the title-page of the earliest existing edition, and of others that followed it, ascribes the Tales; and they are expressly attributed to him in the *Athenæ Oxonienses* of Anthony à Wood. It will be worth while, before proceeding further, to add a short notice of Andrew Borde, for few persons ever had either a more eccentric character or a stranger history. He united in himself the diverse characteristics of an austere ascetic, a learned physician, and a facetious mountebank. At a very early age,—younger in fact, than the rules of the Order allowed,—he became a Carthusian monk at the London Charterhouse, continuing in that life

some twenty years. It is the strictest of all Orders; and at a later date we find him writing to the prior of another Carthusian house that he is "nott able to byd the rugurosite off your relygyon." He tells us also that he was "dispensyd with the relygyon by the byshopp of Romes bulles," being appointed suffragan bishop in the diocese of Chichester; but he never entered upon the duties of the office, and it does not appear that he ever received consecration. Perhaps the vegetarianism of the Order was his particular stumbling block, for he still persevered in a life of celibacy and severe fasting, wearing a hair-shirt by day and hanging a winding-sheet beside his bed at night. He obtained his degree in medicine at Oxford and studied also in foreign schools. He was very successful in his treatment of diseases, and is said to have been appointed physician to the King. But he also sold his medicines publicly in fairs and markets, puffing them with ludicrous harangues, whence he became known as Merry Andrew. Many writers have spoken of him as the original from whom this name became proverbial, but this appears to be more than doubtful. His love of joking was so strong that he could not refrain from playing upon his own name, which he latinised as *Andreas Parforatus*,—Andrew Perforated, or *Bored*. Eventually he was incarcerated, for some unknown reason, in the Fleet Prison, where, after only a few weeks, he died in 1549. We have a quaint and characteristic illustration of his humour in *The First Boke of the Introduction of Knowledge*, which he

dedicated in 1542 to the Princess Mary. The first chapter, "which treateth of the natural disposition of an English man," is headed by "the picture of a naked man with a piece of cloath lying on his right arm and a pair of scissors in his left hand," with the verses,—

> I am an Englishman and naked I stand here,
> Musing in my mind, what rayment I shall were.

Anthony à Wood, quoting this, adds that his "Merry Tales of the Mad Men of Gotham," printed in the time of King Henry VIII., was then "accounted a Book full of wit and mirth by Scholars and Gentlemen. Afterwards, being often printed, is now sold only on the stalls of Ballad-singers."

Borde's authorship of the Tales has however been questioned by eminent authorities, and it has been thought more likely that the compilation was made by some hack-writer, probably in London, whom the publisher employed, and that the well-known initials of Andrew Borde were added on the title-page to promote the sale of the book; just as another popular compilation, known as the *Jests of Scogin*, was attributed to him, though it is certain that he was not the author of it. The only other person, however, to whom the Gotham Tales have been attributed is Lucas de Heere, a Flemish painter who resided in England in the time of Elizabeth and who is named as the author by Walpole. And though there is no direct evidence to show that they were Borde's work, there are coincidences which fit in with the early account that ascribes them to him;

for Lord Dacre's manor of Gotham close to his home may well have suggested the name to him, especially if he had such a reason as has been assigned for ridiculing a meeting that was held there; and we have sufficient ground for believing that he knew the other Gotham, with which tales like these had been associated at least a century before his day, for he was a great traveller, and we learn from his *Peregrination* that in "Notinghamshire" he visited "Notingham, Maunsfeld, Newerk upon Trent, Blithe, Warsop, Ratfoorth, Bawtree."

But it is hardly necessary to ask the question which of the two Gothams has a prior right to claim these Tales as its own. It is impossible to agree with those who have argued that the Tales properly and originally belong to Sussex and were transferred to the more northern Gotham by the compiler of the chap-book; for there is no doubt that the Nottinghamshire village bore from time immemorial the character which is here assigned to it. On the other hand, the coincidence can hardly be accidental when we find a second Gotham near the birthplace of the alleged compiler and in a district which possessed similar stories.. It is probably an example of a controversy in which both sides are right. If both Pevensey and the Nottinghamshire village are among the places to which tales of this kind belonged, and in particular if each of them was one of the numerous places where, as we shall see, the people were credited with having penned the cuckoo, it is very possible that both Gothams were in the compiler's

mind and that he took stories which were told of the one place and made them serve for the other place.

The present name of Peofens-ea, the "isle of Peofen," comes from some hero of Saxon days; and the place is made famous in history by the landing of William the Conqueror; for in those days it was on the sea-shore, though a mile's breadth of pasture-land has now been silted up on the south of it. From it the Conqueror led his Normans forward to their great victory over Harold at Senlac on the neighbouring hills. But the spot has an older record as the Anderida of the Roman occupation. It gave its name to the great forest of the Andredsweald which spread northward from the sea-coast almost to the Thames and measured more than a hundred miles from east to west. When the first Saxon invaders had for nearly thirty years been pushing their conquest up the Thames, of which the story must be told in a later chapter, the chieftain Ælla in 477 landed a new force on the coast of Sussex; many Britons fell; but many escaped into the Andredsweald; and fourteen years passed before Ælla could accomplish the fall of Andredceaster.

Of the long and obstinate resistance made by its British defenders, and of the fierce determination of their assailants, a very full account has been given by Henry of Huntingdon who wrote his *Histories of the English* in the twelfth century, and his graphic story is worth transcribing. "Ella, relying upon his vast forces, besieged the strongly fortified city of Andredecester: whereupon the Britons flocked

together like bees and defeated the besiegers with stratagems by day and with attacks by night. There was not a day nor a night in which the minds of the Saxons were not exasperated by new and ill-omened tidings ; but these only made them fiercer, and they beset the city with incessant assaults. Yet always as they assailed it the Britons pressed upon them in the rear with their archers and with javelins thrown with thongs. Therefore the Pagans left their walls and directed their steps and their arms against them. Then the Britons excelling them in swiftness ran and sought the woods and came upon them from behind when they returned towards the walls again. By this device the Saxons were harrassed a long time and there was an immense slaughter of them, until they divided their army into two parts, so that while one part was storming the city there might be on their rear a line of fighting men drawn up to oppose the assaults of the Britons. And then the citizens, worn out with long want of food, when they could no longer endure the pressure of their assailants, were all devoured by the sword, with the women and children, so that not even one escaped. And the foreigners, because they had suffered such losses there, destroyed the city so utterly that it was never afterwards rebuilt. To those who pass by it the site alone as of a very noble city is pointed out in its desolation."

An irregular oval enclosure of some nine acres is still surrounded by the remains of massive Roman walls, in which several of the buttress-towers are

standing, though several others have fallen and large parts of the walls have slipped down into the boggy marshland. In the south-east angle of the enclosure are the ruins of the Norman castle founded by Robert Earl of Mortaigne who was half-brother to William the Conqueror.

The very important part which Pevensey thus played in the great struggle of the Britons against their invaders is of considerable interest in connection with the probable origin of the cuckoo myth. When Merry Andrew "gathered," as his title-page says, the materials of his stories from various sources, he may have met with this one in his native place, or at the other Gotham, or at both. At any rate the existence of Gotham stories at Pevensey gives additional reason for thinking that they sprang out of the feud between the Briton and the Saxon.

CHAPTER V

THE CUCKOO-PENNERS

It almost goes without saying that where the people of any place become the butt of their neighbours' wit, and are credited with abnormal folly such as is attributed to the people of Gotham, a difference of race is at the foundation of such ridicule. The Phrygians, hemmed in among their mountains in the central district of Asia Minor and sprung from an older stock than the immigrants who surrounded them, were accounted the most stupid of the Asiatics. The Boeotians, an ancient tribe who lived in a hollow among the hills on the confines of Attica, were despised by the Athenians as the fools of Greece, so that when Horace describes a dullard it is one of whom "you may swear that he was born in the foggy air of the Boeotians." And the same character was borne, perhaps most notoriously of all, by Abdera on the coast of Thrace, a town that was occupied by an Ionian colony driven from the opposite coast by the advance of Cyrus and never able to assimilate with its Thracian neighbours, so that Juvenal could call it the "the father-land of mutton-heads," and when Cicero would ridicule the

stupidity of the Roman senators he stigmatised their city as an Abdera.

The Germans have their proverbial fools in the people of Schildburg, and a number of traditional stories similar to the *Tales of the Wise Men of Gotham* was collected and published in the latter part of the sixteenth century under the title of *The History of the Schildburghers*, which has been as popular in Germany as the corresponding book has been in England. The Schildburghers, we are told, were descended from one of the famous Wise Men of Greece, and were reckoned so extraordinarily wise that the kings of all the various nations invited them to take part in their councils, until at last their own home affairs became so neglected and their wives so disconsolate that they were driven to feign themselves fools in their desire to be allowed to remain at home in peace; and they received a document, signed and sealed by the Emperor, according to them the privilege of performing every possible act of folly. These boors of Schilda built themselves a council-house with no windows, and looked all round it to discover why it was dark; then, holding a council, each one with a torch fixed upon his hat, they decided to carry some daylight in, and filled boxes, baskets and tubs with sunbeams, which they tried to empty into the room: when this failed, they decided to take their roof away, and that plan was successful for the summer, but when the winter came they were forced to replace the roof and have torches in their hats again;

till one day light fell through a crevice on a councillor's beard, and they bethought them of a window. They built a mill and quarried a huge millstone for it in a neighbouring mountain-top, and carried it down with infinite labour; then, recollecting that it might more easily have been rolled down, they carried it up again; but they must be sure of not losing sight of it in its descent, therefore one of them got into the hole in the middle of it; but it rolled into a pond, stone and man alike were lost, and they supposed he had carried it off and sold it; whereupon they published a notice in the neighbouring towns, enquiring for a man with a millstone round his neck. Their final achievement was to turn themselves out of house and home; and like the Jews they became wanderers throughout the world, so that there is no country where their descendants may not be found. Even if the story had not implied that the Schildburghers were foreigners by assigning them a Greek origin, it would be easy to infer that they were people of an older stock who were retained by their conquerors, like the Chaldeans in Babylon, as useful men who knew the secrets of the land; but the newer race were eager to be rid of them at last, and thus they became wandering outcasts.

The joke of charging the inhabitants of a place or district with having pent up the cuckoo is to be met with in various parts of the country as well as at Gotham. It is best known as a Somersetshire story. The wise men of that county, says a writer in *Notes*

and Queries, took an unfledged cuckoo and built a high wall to imprison it; there they fed it; and the little bird grubbed on quietly till its wings were grown, and then it flew away: they had forgotten that it would learn to fly, and therefore they had not thought of roofing the enclosure.

More particularly, the people of Somerset are ridiculed as the "Cuckoo-Penners" by their neighbours in Wiltshire, and they retaliate upon the Wiltshire folk as the "Moonrakers." One of the tales already noticed as told of the men of Gotham, though not included in the chap-book collection, is this joke of raking out the moon from the village horse pond under the delusion that it was a cheese. It appears that although the whole county gets the credit of the action, the story belonged originally to particular places in it. Pewsey is one of these. More especially the people of Bishops Cannings near Devizes are prominent as moonrakers, and other tales of the Gotham class are told of them. Indeed it seems that they have kept up their character as the "naturals" of the district until quite recent times; for it is on record that when the comet of 1847 appeared in the sky the whole village set off over the hills towards "the Vies," as the near neighbours call Devizes, to get a closer view of it. Wiltshire men were clever enough, however, to make good use of their moonraking fame on one occasion in the smuggling days when some of them had helped to run into a Dorset cove a cargo of spirit which had paid no dues to the King; for after

they had conveyed their share of the booty into their own county, to replenish the cupboards of the neighbouring farms, the Preventive men pursued them, only to find that the smugglers were a party of country yokels raking a pool of water in the moonlight, and protesting, as they pointed to the reflection of the moon, that they were trying to get that cheese; whereupon they were let alone as hopeless idiots, and the rakes brought back the sunken kegs of spirits. Wiltshire men would fain claim this incident as the origin of the story, and accordingly they glory in their soubriquet. Thus the Swindon Football Club calls itself the Moonrakers; and quite recently the newspapers told of some twenty of them coming to London to see a match betweeen two leading clubs on the Tottenham ground and causing much merriment as they passed along the streets in the smocks and hats of hay-carters, with their banner of the moon and the crossed hay-rakes displayed aloft. Similarly, a leading cricket club in Somersetshire has decorated itself with the proud title of the Cuckoo-Penners. And it may fairly be presumed that here also, as in Wiltshire, the story belonged to some particular place or places before it became the property of the county.

Both the Wiltsætas and the Somersætas, it should be remembered, brought their names to these two counties when they were merely "settlers" among the Britons. They had migrated thither out of the kingdom of Wessex when that

kingdom extended no farther westward than the lands which are now Hampshire and Berkshire. The district of the Wiltsætas was not annexed by the men of Wessex until 556, when, as the Chronicle relates, Cynric and Ceawlin defeated the Britons at Beran-byrig, the hill fort of Barbury on the Wiltshire Downs. The district of the Somersætas lay outside the Saxon realm till another century had passed; for it was not until 658, according to the Chronicle, that Cenwalh won a part of the lands of the Somersætas by his victory at Peonna or Pen,—whether this were Pen Selwood or Pen Hill in Mendip or Pen on Brent Knoll,—and he "drove the Welshmen as far as Pedrida," or Petherton, and made the River Parret his boundary; and it was not until 710 that Ina, a later descendant of Cerdic, brought all the Somersætas' lands into his kingdom by the defeat of the British King Geraint. The history leads us to expect that while surviving remnants of the British race were but small in the districts of the Saxon's earliest conquests they would certainly be more numerous in Wiltshire and more numerous still in Somerset. We may reasonably conclude that both the original moon-rakers of the one county and the original cuckoo-penners of the other belonged to that British survival.

There is, however, one place in Wiltshire where the people are said to have pent the cuckoo. The southern boundary of the county crosses the river Avon about twenty miles above its mouth. The

DOWNTON MOOT HILL.

E. Langham, Photo

southernmost village on the Wiltshire side is Downton, and the northernmost village on the Hampshire side is Charford. At Downton, within private grounds on the south of the village, is a British entrenchment of horse-shoe form opening out on the river and protected by outer banks and ditches behind. Trees have been planted and walks have been laid out upon it in modern times, but its form is still plainly to be seen. At each end of the inner bank is a lofty mound. On the northern mound, known as Execution Hill, criminals have been put to death within the times that local tradition has not forgotten. The southern mound, seventy feet high, is Moot Hill. A descriptive sketch of it, compiled by the Rev. Arthur du Boulay Hill, sometime vicar of Downton, tells us that "the slope towards the river is carved into six large steps or terraces, rising one above the other from a level plat below. The space between this and the river, naturally marshy, has now been laid out as a large fish pond. This remarkable terraced mound is probably a unique instance of a Saxon open-air court constructed within an older British earthwork." Downton gives its name to the Hundred, and doubtless the Hundred-moot as well as the Town-moot was held at Moot Hill.

Cerdic and Cynric his son, two aldermen of the Angles, came in 495 with five ships to Cerdics-ore, which was doubtless the shore of the Solent or of Southampton Water, and they fought the Britons there. Twenty-five years later they "obtained the

kingdom of the West Saxe," as the Chronicle relates, and their descendants reigned thenceforward. In that year, 519, they fought the Britons at Cerdicsford, which is undoubtedly Cheordicsford, now Charford. This was the northern limit of their conquest up the Avon. They stopped short of the strong fortress of Downton. How long it resisted them we cannot tell; but at least it was long enough for this line to become defined as a permanent boundary, and thirty-seven years passed before Cerdic won what we know as Wiltshire. We may infer therefore that Downton was a place where a British remnant survived. And its people have the reputation of being cuckoo-penners. A village poet of recent times has versified the story, and has attributed to the "the Wise Men of Downton" all the tales that belong to Gotham, including the attempt to outwit King John.

Some from a pond the moon essayed to rake,
And some an eel were drowning in a lake;
Some on a shed with carts and waggons stood
To cast a shadow on a neighbouring wood.
Here wives were rolling cheeses down a hill,
There boys with pack-thread tugging at a mill.
Some gates were shutting of a neighbouring field,
From winds and draughts the lambs and calves to shield.
Here round a bush with idiotic grin
A ring was formed to hedge a cuckoo in.

* * * *

All played their parts, and John for ever after
Could never think of Downton without laughter.

It is reasonable to infer that the Cuckoo myth was indigenous here, and that this, coupled with the fact that King John in his recorded journeys paid at

least three visits to the place, suggested the addition of the rest of the Gotham story, together with the moonrakers' tale which is not in the Gotham series, and also others which probably the genius of the writer invented.

Passing from Somerset across the Severn, we find an instance of the Cuckoo myth on the Welsh border. It is cited by Mr. Stapleton from a writer in *Notes and Queries*. The people of Risca, a village situated up the Ebbw River some five miles above Newport in Monmouthshire, are said to have hedged in the cuckoo and to have earned the title of "the fools of Risca." Since Monmouthshire belongs historically to Wales, and was accounted part of Wales until King Henry VIII. decreed that it should be in England, Risca is evidently a village of Welshmen, held in contempt by the settlers in the "new port" of the Saxon.

And we certainly have good ground for connecting the Cuckoo myth with the feud between Saxon and Briton in some cases where it appears in the North of England. Austwick is a township in the parish of Clapham in the West Riding of Yorkshire, and a "wick" is understood to imply a British village which the invaders occupied. The "carles of Austwick" have an old reputation for stupidity, though now they are as shrewd as their neighbours. They are said not only to have hedged in the cuckoo but also to have hauled a cow to the top of a thatched roof to eat off the grass which had grown there. A gardener from this place a few years ago was told

by his employer to carry his wheelbarrow to the carpenter when its wheel was broken; but he refused, saying that if a man were seen carrying a wheelbarrow he would be greeted with shouts of "Austwick! Austwick!" The position of this village of Austwick deserves to be noted. It is on the borders of the old British kingdoms of Elmet and Strathclyde, the former conquered by Edwin of Northumbria in 616, and the latter by Eadbert, the last of the old stock of the Northumbrian Kings, in 756. Above the village on the north-west rises the great hill of Ingleborough, well known to tourists for the stream that springs near its higher levels and dashes into the ghastly chasm of Gaping Gill to find its way through three miles of limestone tunnels and reappear from the deep caves that open behind the village of Clapham. The flat summit of the mountain shows remains of primitive earthworks, and also of stone circles popularly called Druidical, and these tell of the time when the Briton held his own here. But the name of Ingleborough tells the other tale of the English making it their fortress, and the village name of Ingleton beneath its western slopes tells of their making their settlement beyond it. Yet again, the great cap-shaped hill of Penyghent which fronts Ingleborough on the east, across the Ribble, bears a name which speaks of the conquered Briton still surviving here after the English had passed westward beyond him. As you look up from the lower valleys of Ribblesdale and gaze at these two mighty masses of limestone,

each with its sandstone crown, rising more than two thousand feet above the sea-level, they stand as impressive memorials of the conflict between the two races which gave each of them its name. And Austwick, lying at the entrance of the valley which separates these two hills, may well have been a spot where the subjugated Briton was suffered to remain. It is entirely consistent with this that the place should have remained a dependency of Clapham parochially, instead of becoming a parish, though each was a village of considerable population and while the annual sheep fair was held at Clapham the cattle fair was at Austwick.

We find a precisely parallel instance in the heart of Northumberland, at Lorbottle, a remote hamlet in the parish of Whittingham, of which an interesting account is given in Mr. David Dixon's *History, Traditions and Folklore of Whittingham Vale.* In the Pipe Roll of 23 Henry II., 1177, "Luverbota" is the land of Alexander de Lilleburn, and a document of the next year gives the name as "Luerbotle." The "bottle" is of course the old English word for a house or building; and an illustration of it may be noted from an early version of the Book of Exodus: *Pharao eode into his botle*,—"Pharaoh went into his house." But the great variety of ways in which the other half of the name is written in ancient documents,—*Leu*, *Liver*, *Luve*, *Lou*, *Lover*, and several more,—shows clearly that its meaning had been lost. It would be hazardous to conjecture what that meaning was; but we may be sure that a scribe of

Elizabeth's time who wrote it "Lower botle" was making a bad guess. The village lies in the valley of the Aln, overlooked from the east by "a ridge of coarse sandstone hills belonging to a series known as the Simonside Grits," and abounding in primitive remains. Cist-væns and spear-heads have been found; cairns and tumuli are numerous; there is an old march-dyke, and more than one British encampment. Castle Hill, rising above the village, is distinguished as having "one of the most important prehistoric hill fortresses in the Vale of Whittingham."

The "cubs," "kebs," or "coves" of Lorbottle are the Gothamites of Northumberland. Some of the tales told of them connect themselves with a pond in the village, called "Puddle." If it rained they were never aware of it till they saw the drops falling on the surface of this pond. One of them fished for trout in the burn and caught a huge eel, which he took home; but none knew what it was, and they decided "to throw the beast into Puddle an' droon him." When they saw the moon rising over the Long Crag they took it to be a huge red cheese and set off with wain ropes to haul it down. When they sat to rest upon a wooden fence none could tell which were his own legs and feet and which were his neighbour's. Finally, they attempted to build the wall round the cuckoo to prevent her departure and so to secure for themselves a perpetual summer. Mr. Hardy, in his *Popular History of the Cuckoo* contributed to the *Folklore Record* of 1879, tells more particularly

that these "Coves of Lorbottle" noted a certain plantation which was the cuckoo's favourite haunt and the spot where she made her earliest appearance, and this they environed with a wall, but as soon as their wall was completed the bird glided quietly over it: yet there is still "a fondly cherished opinion among the seniors of the place that if the wall had only been elevated a little higher the darling project would have been achieved."

CHAPTER VI

THE CUCKOO MYTH IN CORNWALL

The Cornishmen are credited with having pent the cuckoo in more than one village. This county, as it stands pre-eminent in its wealth of prehistoric earth-works and stone circles, is one of the richest also in its legendary lore. An abundant collection of such lore is to be found in Hunt's *Popular Traditions of the West of England.* There is the demon Tregeagle who "haunts equally the moor, the rocky coasts, and the blown sand-hills of Cornwall," condemned for his wicked deeds to wander till the doom; and in every tempest the loudest din that is heard above the winds is the hideous howling of Tregeagle, and whenever there is calm the plaintive murmur that sighs over the water is his mournful wailing. And there is the Midnight Hunter with his headless hounds, who rides into Cornwall along the ancient track known as the Abbot's Way on Dartmoor, and who once caused even Tregeagle to yield up the earl's daughter whom he had imprisoned within his castle walls. And there is the Bargest, or Bear-ghost,—the great black spectre-hound, both dog and bear, who brings the death-warning to all that meet him; but he can never cross running water. The

spectral ship is to be seen from time to time, bringing the same death-warning, in Porthcurno Bay and elsewhere along the coast. King Arthur hovers about in the form of a raven, waiting for the day when he will recover his kingdom (readers of *Don Quixote* will remember the legend); and the Cornish chough's red beak and talons are marked with the blood of the King's death-wounds. Giants are everywhere among the rocks, and fairies in all the valleys, and mermaids all along the coasts. Strange customs still lingering on are relics of the Baal-fires of old heathen worship. The belief in witchcraft is not yet forgotten, and appeared quite lately in evidence given at the local police courts; and children are still immersed in holy wells to cure them of infantile diseases and pains. Cornwall, therefore, affords a fertile soil on which any ancient myth may be expected to flourish.

The story of penning the cuckoo appears here at Towednack near St. Ives, as is related by a correspondent of *Notes and Queries*. But the hedge which the people of this place built around the bird takes the form of a stone wall; and as the escaping cuckoo almost touched the top of it, the Cornishmen argued that they would have kept her in if they had made their wall one course higher. The myth in this instance is the more interesting because it repeats itself in a varied form in the story of the village feast, as told by Mr. Hunt. This is held on the Sunday nearest to the 28th of April, and is known as the Cuckoo Feast, —not, however, merely because this is the time that

the cuckoo appears each year. The tale is that one year, when the winter lasted late into the spring and the cold was still severe, an old inhabitant invited his neighbours to a repast and threw upon the fire a hollow tree-stump, out of which flew a cuckoo; and he caught the bird and kept it by him, resolving at the same time that the feast should be held upon this day every year, and should be called the Cuckoo Feast: for up to that time Towednack had been singular in not having a yearly village feast like its neighbours. This tale of the feast plainly shows that the purpose of hedging in the cuckoo was, as at Gotham, that she might sing all the year and so preserve a perpetual summer.

Others of the Gotham Tales have fastened themselves upon one or other of the towns and villages of Cornwall. One place is ridiculed by its neighbours because its fishermen threw a conger-eel overboard to drown it; another because they threw a gull over the cliff to break its neck; another because they tried to drown a man in a dry ditch. Of the fishermen of St. Ives it is said that when a flock of sheep was blown into the bay from the Gwithian sands they supposed that a new kind of fish had appeared and at once they took nets and lines and put out their boats to catch them. Others are said to have gone out to bring home what they supposed to be a floating grindstone, and when they reached it their leader leaped upon it from the boat and it proved to be a sheet of sea-foam gathered within a large wooden hoop. The men of Gorran

reversed the story of the moonrakers, for they tried to throw the moon over the cliff into the sea.

The Cuckoo story itself is localised also in the neighbourhood of Perranzabuloe, far down the coast of the Bristol Channel, where it is one among the numerous myths and legends with which that particular district abounds. Perranzabuloe,—St. Perran's-in-Sabulo, or in the sand,—is distinguished thus because of its wild wastes and dreary hills of sand which here stretch inland from the sea-beach. It is one of three parishes which bear the name of the popular Cornish Saint, Perran or Piran, who is said to have landed here from Ireland in the sixth century; and something of his story deserves to be told before we come to the tale which most concerns us. He is St. Kieran in his native land; but the Gaelic *K* of the Irishman is changed into the Brythonic *P* of the Cornishman. A Cuckoo tale already belonged to him in Ireland; though, it should be added, some versions of it substitute other birds. Liadhain, his mother (as we read in Baring-Gould and Fisher's *Lives of the British Saints*), had founded a religious house and was one of the first abbesses of the Irish Church. Her kinswoman Buriena, of a family which St. Patrick himself had christened, was a sister of her community; but a heathen named Diman from West Meath, struck with her beauty, carried her away to his castle, and Kieran pursued and demanded that she should be restored. "Never (said Diman), till I hear the cuckoo call at day-dawn and arouse me from my

sleep." A deep snow covered the ground; but Kieran and his companions spent the night in prayer outside the castle walls. In the morning a cuckoo was sitting upon each of the many turrets of the building and uttering its call; and Diman, amazed at the marvel, released the maiden, who crossed the sea with her rescuer and became known in Cornwall as St. Buryan. There are many tales of the miracles by which St. Piran befriended the Irish people. He had fed ten Kings and their armies for ten days with three cows, and he had restored to life their dogs that were killed in hunting elk and boar, and had raised again their warriors who fell on the battlefield; but they cast him off a precipice into the sea with a millstone about his neck in a furious storm, whereupon the tempest ceased and the sun shone out, and Piran sat upon the stone and floated safely over into Cornwall: so the wild legend has grown out of the fact that he carried with him his altar-stone: and he landed on the 5th of March, St. Piran's Day, on the sands that bear his name. Here St. Piran built his church,—superseded soon afterwards by the little simple sanctuary which the sand overwhelmed in later times and explorers have unearthed in modern times, and beside it they unearthed too a huge skeleton which is believed to be St. Piran's own; and a new church was built beyond the lake which the flowing sand would not cross; but a miner drained the lake away; and a third time the church was built where the sand is effectually

checked by the little brook between Perran and Cubert. The Saint is the patron of the tin-miners; for he had discovered the mystery of tin by burning accidentally a heavy black stone which he had used in his fireplace, when the heat of the fire caused the white metal to flow out of it; and after the discovery had become known and voyagers from far and near were arriving in search of the new-found treasure, the natives—as the story goes—entrenched St. Agnes' Beacon and made the great bank and ditch which protects the coast for two miles from Porth-Chapel-Comb to Breanic-Comb, and made also the famous circular entrenchments commonly called the "Rounds", of which one of the finest is to be seen at Perran. The Saint left his blessing also on Perran Well, and little suffering children were put through a cleft rock upon the sea-shore into its healing water, until the spring was tapped by miners in recent years, and the well is gone; and the sculptured canopy which ancient piety had set over it is gone also to adorn the grounds of a neighbouring mansion.

The adjoining market-town of St. Agnes was in old times a chapelry of the parish of Perranzabuloe. Here the well of St. Agnes is in a dingle near the shore called Chapel-Comb, and its healing virtue was reputed to be even more marvellous than that of St. Piran's Well. Above this town on the east the great mass of rock rises up six hundred and sixty feet from the shore, crowned by an ancient cairn which was adapted in old times as a beacon and

was kept ready for use when all our coasts were in terror lest Napoleon should invade us. Along the foot of the Beacon Rock are still to be seen the remains of the great vallum which the people of the place are said to have thrown up to protect their prolific tin mines. And these people of St. Agnes have the credit of attempting to hedge in the cuckoo. They retaliate upon their neighbours at Redruth with the question, "Who crowned the donkey?" but this is explained by the tradition that in zeal for the Jacobite cause and disloyalty to the House of Hanover a donkey was publicly crowned at Redruth on the day of the coronation of King George IV. No explanation can be found for the other joke of the St. Agnes folk having penned the cuckoo.

The parish of Cubert lies next to Perranzabuloe on the north. Here we have another of the holy wells, famed for healing the sickly children of the peasantry, in a fantastic cavern of the cliff, where the water dropping from above is coloured with various hues from the richness of the minerals and forms a bed of stalagmite bright with corresponding colours. And here on the summit of the hill we have a fine "Round," with its embankment well preserved, the road from Cubert to Newlyn crossing the middle of it, and the rest of the enclosure growing such stunted trees as are able to resist their exposure to the sea winds. Some say that the people of Cubert are charged with having penned the cuckoo. One would expect to hear further that this Round with its weather-beaten trees was the

spot in which they impounded her, like the Cuckoo Bush at Gotham; but this at any rate is not specified as the story is now told. It may be that the story of Cubert has only arisen out of some confusion with that of the neighbouring town of St. Agnes.

Whether it can be connected with the feud between Saxon and Briton in Cornwall, as it appears to be in other counties, is a further question. A guess might naturally suggest itself that Cubert, with its church dedicated to St. Cuthbert, was a Saxon settlement, as this latter name might seem to indicate; and then at once we should expect to find the racial hatred asserting itself. But there is little doubt that the name of St. Cuthbert was substituted here by medieval Churchmen for the name of an obscure Cornish saint of whom nothing was known to them; for the village feast-day is the festival of St. Cuby, or Keby, who gives his name also to the village of Cuby adjoining Tregoney near the south-west coast. There are many instances of such substitution of a well-known saint's name for one that was less famous. The town of St. Agnes is another example, for its people call it St. Anne's, and its true patronal saint is probably Anne the mother of Carantog, or Crantock, a friend of St. Patrick, who gives his name to the parish of St. Crantock adjoining Cubert. It is difficult, therefore, to apply to the Cuckoo myth in Cornwall the same interpretation that belongs to it elsewhere. And in fact some Cornish antiquaries have found reason to doubt whether in any case the myth is really indigenous in

Cornwall and has not rather been imported by some chance out of England proper. But at all events its appearance in the extreme south-west serves to illustrate the extent to which it spread itself throughout our land.

CHAPTER VII

THE COUNTRY OF THE CUCKOO PENS

In several of our rural parishes there is a spot which has been known from time immemorial as the Cuckoo Pen. Usually the villagers have their own interpretation of it, which is often quite worthless, but in some cases is not without interest. In the great majority of cases, if not in all, the spot is marked by its surroundings as one of archæological interest. We may therefore look for some connection between this traditional designation and the fable of the men who pent the cuckoo.

The district in which these Cuckoo Pens abound is along the west front of the Chiltern Hills of Oxfordshire and in the adjacent valley, while isolated examples are known also in the more remote part of the same county and in the neighbouring counties of Berkshire and Buckinghamshire. It will therefore be worth while first to take a general survey of the central district of the Cuckoo Pens and to note the value of its position from a historical and antiquarian point of view. For the country which we know as Oxfordshire was formed by Nature to be a scene of great events. It fits like a wedge between our most important river and one of our most important lines

of hills. The Thames is the chief of the dividing lines which strike across England from west to east. The Chiltern Hills, though they rise to little more than eight hundred feet, yet have nothing loftier between them and the German Ocean, and they form part of the great backbone of secondary rocks which runs through the island from north to south, overlooking the level tertiary strata of the eastern districts and forming an upward step towards the rugged mountainous rocks of the primary formations on the west of it. The geologist can take his stand upon this ridge of chalk and kindred substances and see it as a kind of axle upon which a vast revolution has been turning, till the huge crests of granite and porphyry and sandstone have rolled themselves up from beneath it on the one side and the pliable clays and loose gravels have thrown themselves forward from above it on the other side; so the bowels of the earth are made visible along the western coast and the sunken forests are not quite hidden when the tides are low along the eastern coast; and between them is this long straggling ridge of undulating hills. Flamborough Head, perforated with its fantastic caverns, juts out into the North Sea at one end of the ridge, and Portland Bill thrusts the relics of its fossilised forest into the English Channel at the other end, and the Chiltern Hills are in the middle of it. Such a line of uplands could not fail to make a strong mark upon the destinies of our country, especially at this point where it is crossed by the largest of our rivers. And here, in the

north-west angle of this important crossing, are the lands which the gradual course of history marked off as the county of Oxford.

The dense woods, too, which clothed these hills, bore an important part in making the district what it was. The name of the Chilterns—the *Ciltria* of monastic chroniclers — is believed to embody a British word *cael* signifying a wood; for its popular interpretation as the "Celts' Hills" is quite impossible, seeing that our ancient forefathers knew nothing about Celts; and another account which would make it mean "chalk hills" cannot be borne out. These woods were notorious in old times as a hiding-place, first for the Britons when the Saxons drove them from the valleys, and then for the Saxons in their turn when they were dispossessed by the Normans, and again for thieves and robbers of all kinds to a much later date. Towards the close of the thirteenth century Brunetto Latini, the tutor of Dante, was travelling in England and left a record of his experiences in which he speaks of the dangers of this district when he passed through it on his way from London to Oxford. The Steward of the Chiltern Hundreds was appointed to put down the robbers and preserve such order and security as he might along the Buckinghamshire side of the hills; and his office, which is maintained to serve a convenient purpose in modern politics, was far from being a sinecure in those days.

Before we pass from the geography of this district to its history, we shall do well to take notice of the

courses of its ancient roads; for the tracks by which men moved from place to place are necessarily among the earliest signs of human occupation. Here of course we find, as we should expect to find, the trackway that runs along the margin of the river, just upon the ridge above the flood-line. And again, almost equally of course, there is the trackway along the summit of the hills, keeping near the brow to overlook the valley; and the trackway also that skirts the foot of the hills, running roughly parallel with the upper one. Nature marked the lines of these, and we shall have occasion to note them as a very important feature along the Chilterns. The lower track is part of the Icknield Way. It led from the district which the Iceni occupied in Suffolk and Norfolk; and it has been commonly understood to be Icen-elde-weg, the Icenian Old Way; but in the tenth century it was Icenhylt, proving it to be Icen-hilde-weg, the Icenian Warriors' Way. The country-folk of the Chilterns know some portions of it by an odd corruption as the "Hackney Way," and other parts, like many ancient roads, are the Portway, or carrying way,—in fact, the road that led to market. But practically along these hills the upper and lower tracks are the double line of a single highway; and when you climb the hillside by a woodland lane, with its ferns and foxgloves and flowering hedgerows, or by a hollow way washed like a watercourse in the side of the open down, you are almost certainly upon one piece or another

of the connecting network by which the two tracks were anciently bound together into one.

The Romans were the great road-makers, here in Britain as elsewhere throughout their empire, taking the tracks which they found and often laying them with more or less of stone to make "streets" where it served their purpose, and often also adding new roads of their own devising. Thus the track along the Chilterns became the Icknield Street, passing in a continuous line from Castor, the castrum of the Romans near Norwich, to Exeter, the Ex-cester or castrum upon the Exe, and beyond it to the tin mines at the farthest south-west corner of the island.

Then we find also that portions of the primitive riverside track along the Thames below the Chilterns were incorporated into another Roman highway. This led westward from London, passing over the brow of these hills near the village of Nuffield above Wallingford; then crossing the "Hackney Way" at Goulds Heath, where relics of Roman occupation are found, and meeting the river at Bensington; whence it followed the river-bank through the Roman town of Dorchester, to cross to the opposite bank in the neighbourhood of Abingdon, and so to wend its way up the valley of the Ock to the Roman settlement at Frilford, thus connecting Dorchester directly with the great meeting-place of Roman roads at Cirencester. This place—the British Coryn latinised as Corinium and Durocornovium, the city of the Dobuni upon the Churn River—calls

for special notice here. It was one of the first towns which the Romans occupied under Aulus Plautius, the emissary of Claudius Cæsar, and they made it one of their chief centres both for military purposes and for civil government. At the present day it is one of our richest treasure-houses of sculptured stones and tessellated pavements and other elaborate relics of Roman workmanship, among which some fragments of its splendid basilica are carefully preserved. Geographically also it is an important site; for while the spring of Thames Head is a short distance to the west, the seven springs of the Churn above the town are at once the most remote from the Thames mouth and the highest above the sea-level, and therefore are in fact the true source of our foremost river. Here at Corinium the road which we have been tracing met the Ermin Way crossing from Southampton to Gloucester and the Severn and South Wales, and also the Akeman Street sweeping round from London to Bath as it merged here with the Fosse Way which came from the remote north-east by Lincoln.

It is with the Akeman Street that we are next concerned. It took its name from its destination, Bath, the Roman *Aquæ Solis*, waters of the sun, or more correctly (it is said) *Aquæ Sulis*, from *Sul* or *Sulis*, the local divinity who presided over the waters; whence it became the Saxon Akemannes-ceaster. Some have said, whether seriously or jocosely, that it is called from the aching man who sought ease and cure at the warm springs. But the

Akeman is simply the bath-man or bather. The old Akeman Street, or Bath Road, passed across the northern part of what is now Oxfordshire, having branched off near St. Albans from the Watling Street which led northward from London, whence it crossed the Ickneild Street near Tring and curved out over the upper courses of the Thames tributaries until it came to Cirencester and thence dropped south-west upon Bath. Lastly we shall have to note a well-marked road leading off from this Akeman Street at Allchester, or Ald-chester, the Old Camp, in the north of Oxfordshire, and passing down the middle of the county, where it was carried by a paved causeway over the swamps of Otmoor; the broken monolith of "Joseph's Stone" in the middle of the moor being perhaps a milestone upon its course; and thence it rounds the foot of Shotover Hill and finally crosses the Thames at Dorchester to make its way towards the south through Berkshire where presently we are to take further note of it.

We see then what manner of country we are in, with a Roman highway passing along each of its three borders and yet another striking from north to south across its middle. These roads alone are enough to assure us that the district was already beginning to be the theatre of eventful scenes for which the hand of Nature had designed it.

But attention must now be turned more closely to the Chiltern Hills. They belong to the upper series of the chalk rocks, their inner substance being chalk with flints, and of these flints we shall have more to

tell. On the surface the hills are thickly wooded with the primeval beech, the characteristic timber of the district.

But the beeches are not the only trees. The highest points upon the Chilterns are beds of overlying clays, relics of a layer which once buried all the chalk beneath it. The loftiest summit in these parts is at Nettlebed, boasting of being the farthest point inland which could be distinguished from any place on the seaside, but the windmill which helped to make it conspicuous has lately been burnt down. Here the clay supplies a brickfield and a pottery, and the name of the hamlet of Crocker End tells its own tale. The neighbouring clay-bed at Stoke Row had its pottery in Roman times, and relics of Roman work are still discovered thereabout, while connoisseurs have professed to detect traces of the old Roman forms in the patterns of the modern work. And wherever you see a grove of oaks among the beech-woods, it is because there is a bed of clay for them to grow in.

Then we have a series of spurs of treeless down projecting into the valley, decked only with fern and juniper, and clad with a soft green turf giving a scanty pasture to the sheep and drying up with wonderful rapidity after a soaking rain ; and if here and there an enterprising farmer has ploughed them he gets but little recompense, so meagre is the covering of earth which hides the chalk. But as we get nearer to the river there are tracts of arable land along the slopes, some tolerably fertile and some of

considerable richness. Their elements, of course, are the débris of those upper hills which have been swept away in the birth-throes of our present continents and oceans; and the flints which were embedded in those upper hills are lying in endless profusion among the soil. Well worthy of examination are these flints, with their strangely twisted and perforated forms, and now and then some substance, organic or otherwise, enclosed in them, a sponge, or a nodule of pyrites, or an echinus or terebratula, either preserved entire or leaving its imprint like a seal within the cavity. They lie thickest of all about the margins of the chalk pits which are to be seen here and there along the hill-front. But here are not only flints which Nature's hand has fashioned; for we find among them abundant relics of primitive man, the flint implements of his toil and the flint weapons of his warfare. We find, in fact, that this has been a great workshop of primeval cutlery, of which the flints are the materials, quarried out from surface-workings in the chalk beds. And still the innumerable chippings of this ancient industry are scattered all around. You may light upon a carefully fashioned knife, or a polished and pointed spear-head, or a finely cut and well barbed arrow-head. The quantity of the flint relics upon this spot suggests that the neolithic savage had here a large emporium from which he supplied his wares, and the Icknield Way and its branches carried the traffic hither and thither, like the railways running from a commercial centre of modern times. History

therefore was being made here long before the days of which we read the records.

Passing down to the river, we have in the district close below these hills a remarkable group of three ancient towns, each of which will figure in the facts that we shall have occasion to notice. Here is Wallingford, on the opposite bank of the river, still retaining the earthworks of its quadrangular enclosure as the Roman-Britons raised them; named by the Saxons as a notable ford of the Wallingas, or sons of the Welsh; disputing with Winchester the honour of being the first chartered borough in the kingdom, since Henry II. bestowed that dignity upon it; and made memorable more especially by its great Norman castle, where Richard King of the Romans, the younger son of King John, maintained a court of stately magnificence which his brother King Henry III. could hardly rival at Windsor.

Just above Wallingford, but on the east of the river and approached through the sometime marshland of Crowmarsh, is Bensington or Benson, prominent as the town of this district which the West Saxon captured in his first great advance across the Thames in 571, and thus becoming a royal vill, as the chronicler Florence of Worcester calls it; its wide manor extending across the hills to Henley and including the greater part of what is now South Oxfordshire; standing foremost among the royal possessions in the county in Domesday Book, where we read that it brought a yearly revenue of £85 to the King and that the "soke" or jurisdiction "of

the three and a half hundreds" of the Chilterns "pertains to this manor"; but the Kings granted away one part of it and another from time to time, until at last King Charles I. sold the manorial rights to some land speculators of the City of London.

Thirdly, we come to Dorchester, the Roman city already mentioned and still to be mentioned again; a place that rose into foremost eminence in our ecclesiastical annals; for it became the seat of the bishopric of St. Berin, or Berinus, the Apostle of the West Saxons, in 635, when he baptised here Cynegils, the West-Saxon King, of the royal stock which eventually became Kings of England, and thus Dorchester has the unique honour of being the place where our royal family were first received into the Christian fold.

Before passing on from this general survey of the district to the points in it that will demand more particular notice, it will be fitting to take account of a reasonable claim which has been put forward for it as having borne a leading part in the earliest scenes of the history of our island. For it has been urged that this is the battle-ground on which the Briton in the year 43 fought his first conflict with the legions sent by Claudius from Rome under Aulus Plautius and Vespasian. The invaders must have met with insurmountable difficulties if they had attempted to land on our eastern coasts as Julius Cæsar had done a century before, because the eastern tribes were the most hostile of all; and, moreover, the accounts which we possess imply a

more lengthy voyage than the mere crossing of the straits. If, therefore, we must assume that they sailed round to the west of the island, they would march up the Severn and down the Thames, passing through the friendly tribe of the Dobuni, who occupied what is now Gloucestershire, and descending from the Cotswolds into our Oxfordshire. Then this would be the district in which they would encounter the paramount tribe of the Catuvellauni under their King Caradoc or Caratacus and his brother Togidumnus, the two sons of Cunobeline, who came forward from the farther end of the Chilterns; and there are good grounds for thinking that their great fight took place about Dorchester. The story of the battle, as related by the historian Dion Cassius, appears to be this. Togidumnus had crossed over to the right bank of the Thames, and Vespasian and a large section of the Roman army followed him, while Plautius and the main body remained on the left bank: there was a fierce engagement on the right bank, and the Britons were forced to retreat; but they could not at once recross in the direction of their own country beyond the Chilterns, as the main body of the Romans faced them; therefore their only escape was eastward on the other side of the river: meanwhile the Dobuni, already well disposed towards the Romans, had declared openly in their favour, and Plautius stationed a garrison to protect them against the Catuvellauni before he followed these down the river: then he found that they had crossed to the north

bank and had taken their stand in a marshy district where they could not easily be attacked and whence they would have ready access to the Chilterns: but his other forces were conveyed across the river above by a bridge of boats, and coming upon the Britons on the side where these were not expecting them they gained a complete victory, and the chieftain Togidumnus was slain: while the Roman also suffered great loss, and instead of following up his advantage on the spot he passed down the river towards the sea and met Claudius himself in Essex. All the story is clear and the details fit well together if the fight took place about Dorchester, if the great British camp on the abrupt hill of Sinodun across the river was the spot which Plautius garrisoned, if the ford which the Catuvellauni crossed was Wallingford, and if the marsh where they encamped was Crowmarsh. Here they would be protected by a network of swamps which they knew well, while their assailants were ignorant of them: here the adjacent hills would offer them ready access to their native district; and here they would see the Roman busy with his work of strengthening the fortified hill near Dorchester, and would little imagine that his main troop was at the same time secretly crossing the river to attack them.

It was to this same meeting-point of the hills and the river that the Saxon came, three centuries later, in the great advance which made him master of all the Upper Thames valleys and soon led him forward to the Severn. And close to the edge of this dis-

trict, where the line of the Chilterns carries itself on beyond the river in the Berkshire Downs—the Æscendune or Ashdown of those days—there came the Dane in his first incursion into the central parts of the land, to receive his first great repulse from Alfred. And close to the edge again, on the Berkshire river-bank, at Wallingford, was the castle to which William the Norman came after the battle of Hastings when he found himself compelled to delay his entrance into London, and where he received the homage of the barons, for Wigod the Saxon thegn of Wallingford was his friend: and under the walls of this same castle in the next century, when the fierce Brien Fitzcount, husband of Wigod's granddaughter, held it for the Empress Maud, the treaty was signed which closed the civil wars of Stephen's reign: and when we come to the Barons' wars, and pass on through the various scenes of our medieval history, we find that the part which Wallingford played in them is prominent again and again; and the same castle was the last in the central parts of England to hold out for King Charles when the civil war between King and Parliament was drawing to a close; and finally Cromwell ordered its complete destruction. It seems as if no scene of old English history could ever be enacted without requiring the aid of this district in some of its events. All this adds to the interest of the fact that the same is the neighbourhood where we have the remarkable cluster of so-called Cuckoo Pens.

CHAPTER VIII

TWO CHILTERN BOUNDARY DYKES

Of the several Cuckoo Pens, so called, along the front of the Chiltern Hills there are two that have a special interest of their own because each of them is connected with an important boundary dyke. It will be convenient therefore to describe these in the first place. It must be remembered that the southern extremity of Oxfordshire is also the southern extremity of the Chiltern Hills. They stop the eastward course of the Thames and turn it southward for ten miles or more through a gap where some primeval convulsion appears to have torn the long chalk ridge in twain and broken the Chiltern Range off from the Berkshire Range. Then gradually the river wends its way back again northward until it can resume its direct eastern course once more some twelve miles from the point at which it left it. The chief part of the hill country within this horse-shoe bend of the river has been marked off at some remote period by a considerable embankment which is known in ancient charters as Grimesdic and in modern parlance either as Grims Dyke or Grims Bank. This is carried in a direct line of ten miles across the ridge from river-bank to river-bank,

starting from Henley on the Lower Thames to reach Mongewell below Wallingford on the Upper Thames. A leading antiquarian of the district in the nineteenth century, Mr. Edward Anderdon Reade, made a very careful examination of it and left full notes in manuscript. He urged that the mode of its construction is evidence of extreme antiquity, for it is alternately bank and trench, and where it is bank there is no depression on either side from which it can have been thrown up, nor are its materials the same as those of the adjacent soil. It is heaped up with chalk, gravel, and clay, carried from the trench above, and carried, we must suppose, in head-loads by means of wicker baskets and with infinite labour. A turf-way several feet in width, running along the inner edge of the bank, is traditionally said to be the way along which these materials were conveyed. What is the reason for this strange method of construction, which would seem to us to involve so much additional toil? Was there the same superstition that has been found among primitive races in other lands, who fear to rob for less sacred purposes the fertile soil that brings them nourishment? And certainly the rude implements with which these ancient toilers delved could work more easily in single spots here and there than in digging all along in a continuous line through the entangled roots of a half-cleared forest. All this carries our thoughts back to the earliest infancy of human handicraft.

The bank was doubtless raised as a boundary by

some tribe of early times which made its settlement up the Thames on this southern end of the Chiltern Hills. It has been attributed to the Ancalites; and though it would be rash to base any argument upon the theories of our older antiquaries, their story of the Ancalites in this district deserves a notice. Dr. Plot, in his *Natural History of Oxfordshire*, took Henley to be "the ancientest Town in the whole County," having a British name, from *hen*, meaning old, and *lley*, a place; and he adds that it "perhaps might be the head town of the people called Ancalites that revolted to Cæsar." It is remarkable that Camden, the historian of Queen Elizabeth's time, tells of the name "Ancastle" still surviving near the western part of the town. But in any case we may suppose a primitive tribe, be they Ancalites or not, coming up the river and making their first location on the bank at Henley where their dyke begins and whence they overspread the district of which the dyke is the northern boundary. And further, the Ancalites bordered on the Atrebates, who had crossed at a later date from Gaul, where the portion of their tribe that stayed behind has bequeathed its name to the province of Artois and to the city of Arras, and the British immigrants occupied a district south of the Thames, having Silchester for their capital. It is at least a plausible theory that when the Ancalites had been subjugated by these newer immigrants—for it has been supposed that they became herdsmen and shepherds of the Atrebates—a remnant of them

was allowed to hold this position in the woods within the bend of the river. Certain it is that some primitive occupants of the extremity of the Chiltern forest formed the great earthwork.

Antiquarians are divided about the meaning of Grims Dyke; for some say that the root-word is to be found in the German *Grenze*, a frontier or boundary, which appears also in the Scottish name of Græme or Graham, a dweller on the frontier. But others connect it with Grimm, the Evil One; and it may well be that when the Saxon came he attributed such a dyke to the "grim" fiend, perhaps in astonishment at its superhuman magnitude or perhaps in hatred of the conquered race who made it, just as many a similar earthwork is called a devil's ditch or an old tumulus is known as Grimsbury. And it is worth noting here that a "grim's ditch" on the Berkshire Downs, nearly opposite to this one in Oxfordshire, is called in a charter of the tenth century *drægeles bæce*, the dragon's ridge; and the folklore of that district, about Blewbury, says that it was ploughed by the devil in one night, and two adjacent barrows are the heaps of scrapings from his plough, while a lesser one is the clod which he threw at his imp for driving crooked.

The Grims Dyke at Henley has entirely disappeared in the town itself, but a document of the close of the sixteenth century shows that the ditch was then to be seen across Bell Street, the chief thoroughfare of the town. It can still be traced in detached portions through the woods, though the plough has cleared

most of it away on the open ground; and since parts of it are only a trench it is obvious that with the crumbling of its sides and with rubbish gathered into it through the lapse of ages there would be nothing to prevent the encroachments of the ploughshare; whereas the embanked portions, often protected by an overgrowth of brushwood, could only be removed with considerable labour. A few remains of it are to be seen within a short distance of Henley, and still more remains throughout the length of Lambridge Wood and along the back of Greys Court, which in one ancient map is "Grimes Court," taking its name from the dyke. It is traceable at intervals as far as Highmore, which is probably the high *mere*, or boundary, and the bank is succeeded by a trench on the plateau beside Highmore Hall; and again it becomes a bank in Swains Coppice, and Hoobury Wood tells its own tale; but in a depression of the hills there is little or nothing to be seen of it until it has crossed the line of the track which follows the hill-front at Nuffield. Then it shows itself again in perfect preservation beneath the western ridge of the hill, running down the thickly-wooded slope in the form of a considerable ditch with a low bank on either side; for here and elsewhere it seems to have been enlarged at some later time. To follow its course you have to push on through the boughs and brushwood, treading the thick bed of decaying beech-leaves; and when you come to the level plateau of cultivated land outside the woods the trench is exchanged for

a bold and lofty bank clothed with turf, dotted here and there with stunted thorn-bushes and brightened in summer-time with harebell and fly-orchis and thyme, and now and then with the rarer bee-orchis. Here again signs of enlargement appear in a slight hollow that runs along the northern side, but the materials of the bank are vastly larger than this little excavation would supply. And especially along these slopes above the river, where the land was at once more fertile and more exposed to the incursions of a foe, some later tribe may well have found the need of raising and strengthening for purposes of defence the bank which in its first purpose had been merely a tribal boundary line. Very probably the Saxons made use of it and added to its height in their gradual occupation of the Briton's land. When we come to the last portion, dropping down the lowest declivity, a few yards of the bank are overgrown with trees and underwood ; and the last half-mile is nothing more than a slight mere-bank surmounted by a hedge and palings as you follow along the strip of beech-plantations reaching to the river-side.

Just within the dyke, and severed by it from Newnham—a "home of new men" when the Saxons settled there—is Mongewell, written in old times Munswell and commonly interpreted as a corruption of Monkswell. The parish stretches upward along the dyke for miles into the interior of the hills, and the little village lies at the bottom near the river. The early settlers who planned their great boundary

did wisely to enclose within it the beautiful well which gives the village its Saxon name. It is a cluster of springs, bubbling up clear as crystal out of the chalk bed, and now spread out into a little lake, where it has been banked to form a mill-head; but the mill is now disused; and thence it splashes on in a shingly brook to pour itself into the river within half a mile of its source. In the angle at the mouth of the brook is the little apsidal church with its quaint relics of early Norman days; and the elevated site on which it stands was plainly a sacred tumulus or barrow of a previous age, perhaps the burial-mound of some primitive chieftain, or perhaps a rallying point of the primitive tribe at this limit of their domain farthest off from Henley. Close to the church there stood until lately a mansion of some antiquity, where a prince-bishop of Durham lived in the first quarter of the nineteenth century; for it was his wife's inheritance; and they planted a park with timber of unusual excellence, noble pines and groves of luxuriant elms, and beeches which are without rivals in the neighbouring beech-lands. They also preserved as a turfed carriage-drive a mile or more of the ancient track along the inner side of Grims Bank by which, according to tradition, its materials were carried down as the ditch was excavated above in the woodland.

We have no need, therefore, to concern ourselves with the theory put forward by Dr. Plot, who, in his book already cited, fancied that this dyke was an embanked military road, leading from Walling-

ford, which he believed to be Calleva Atrebatum, to Colnbrook, which he identified with Pontes; nor with the theory of Skelton, in his *Antiquities of Oxfordshire*, who took this to be a second Offa's Dyke thrown up by that monarch when he conquered Cynewulf of Wessex at Bensington in 777 and added this district to his Mercian realm. Whoever may have widened or heightened Grims Dyke afterwards, it probably existed here before either Saxon or Roman visited the valley of the Thames.

We have now to pass on some two or three miles northward. There, lying almost parallel with Grims Dyke, was a similar but less prominent earthwork of which some large portions remain. It began at Bensington or Benson,—a place whose history will call for fuller notice in another chapter,—and there it was known as the Medlers Bank; for Dr. Plot describes an embanked way, running west of Benson Church and called by that name, in the seventeenth century. This dyke took a wider sweep across the Chiltern Hills, so as to enclose the whole of the district within the bend of the river, whereas Grims Dyke only enclosed about three-quarters of it. A glance at the map will show that Benson is the point at which the river turns sharply from its eastward course and flows directly southward, and the point at which it finally resumes its straight course eastward is just below Henley, near the village of Medmenham. Benson and Medmenham are thirteen miles apart in a direct line, and the bank lay between them curving out about a mile to the northward.

At each of these points it terminated in an important and well-marked entrenchment. That at Medmenham is well known. It consists of a large quadrangular camp covering an area of about eleven acres and called popularly the Danes Ditches. The front of it is protected by a high escarpment of the chalk hill rising from the river-bank, clothed with abundant growth of yews and hollies and with box shrubs which are said to be indigenous here. The other end is rounded off into a rude horse-shoe form and fortified with a double vallum. It is reputed to have been the work of the Danes when they made their great raid up the Thames Valley at the close of the ninth century; but if this is so, there is little doubt that they only gave additional strength to an already existing earthwork. Near it is the modern mansion known as Danesfield; and a little farther are some mounds and ditches which mark the site of the stronghold of Hugh de Bolebec, the Norman lord, where the ruins of "Bullbank's Castle" stood in Hearne's time; and again a mile down the river is Medmenham Abbey, having the remains of the old Cistercian house incorporated in the sham-antique building where the motto over an old doorway, *Fay ce que voudras*, recalls the hideous debaucheries and profanities of Sir Francis Dashwood's so-called Franciscan Monks, or Hell Fire Club, of the eighteenth century.

Burrow Farm on the hill-top, a mile to the north-west of Danes Ditches, marks the course of our dyke, whence it would run forward by Hambledon

and along Henley Hill, so passing the southern end of Stonor Park; though no traces of it appear to have attracted notice in these parts. But along the western portion of its course, and for more than half its length, the line of it is clearly made out. It shows well in Pishillbury Wood, protecting the north-eastern front of the hill. After this it has left no signs for a mile or two, but it appears again very distinctly along the roadside west of the hamlet of Russells Water, where a rough bank is to be seen sometimes north and sometimes south of the modern highway which crosses it and recrosses. Then, after a short break where the plough has destroyed it, a very fine bank, marked on the Ordnance Map as "Danish Intrenchment," runs through the beech-woods and along the northern front of Swyncombe Down. At the end, instead of descending the abrupt western front of the down, it forks upon the brow and throws a branch down each angle to meet the Icknield Way at the foot. From the point where the southern branch of the bank meets it there is a field-way ascending the opposite slope, and probably there was another to converge with it from the northern branch also; after which the line is traceable in the direct course either by field-way or by footpath, with an interruption here and there, all the way to Benson. We may presume that a great part of it, like the line of the Grims Dyke, would be ditch instead of bank across the open fields; and accordingly along the upper part of the Ewelme fields, for nearly half a mile, we find a broad strip of waste

ground, covered with grass and underwood, called the Shaw,—a common term for a copse or shady place,—where a ditch beside the footpath measures some feet both in width and depth. It has been enlarged within living memory to carry off the waters of a spring which breaks out at rare intervals in the adjacent field; but it would seem that already the ditch was of considerable size. Then the track goes on, lost for a few yards across some marshy ground called the Pitles, but reappearing as a footpath with a hedge and a small trench beside it, chiefly remarkable as forming the boundary which divides the orchards and smaller enclosures at the back of Ewelme from the open fields to the north of them. This footpath is lost for a third of a mile across the manor of Fifield from time immemorial; but sixty years ago it existed along the upper part of the village of Benson, forming a boundary at the back of the enclosures exactly as it does at Ewelme. The line of its original continuation in Benson may easily be noted still, leading out by the Castle Inn yard and proceeding thence by the present roadway along the front of the churchyard to the river.

No traces of an embankment are now to be seen at Benson except what the churchyard affords. But the line upon which the church stands is a ridge from which the ground slopes sharply northward and slightly southward also; and a few yards directly east of the church, at a depth of eight feet below the surface and two feet below the level of previous burials, a fragment of rude pottery was found a few

years ago, with the jaw and other bones of an ox, in a layer of undisturbed sand, proving that the soil at this depth had been deposited after human occupation had commenced here. It is evident therefore that Benson Church was built upon the bank, just as Mongewell Church was built upon a primitive tumulus a short distance within the line of the parallel Grims Dyke. In some villages an entrenched camp became the churchyard and the church was built within it, as at West Wycombe in the Chilterns and at Finchampstead in Berkshire. At Benson the church stood a few yards above the eastern boundary of the camp, which therefore lay between it and the river. Old inhabitants still remember its western bank near the riverside, with the roadway passing along within it; but all remains of it disappeared entirely when the ground was levelled and enclosed in the middle of the nineteenth century. It is frequently mentioned in the older descriptions of the village, and to the present day the general outline of it is preserved in a quadrangular meadow with the roadways completely encompassing it. Its former character is described in Boydell's *History of the River Thames*, in 1754, where we learn that "west of the church is a bank and trench in a square form; the north side still retains somewhat of its original appearance; to the west and south they are readily traced; but to the east it requires a minute examination to discern them." Thomas Hearne, the gossiping antiquary of the beginning of the eighteenth century, gives a description of it which

is worth quoting, though he magnifies it into the remains of a ditch surrounding the town; for in his edition of Roper's *Life of Sir Thomas More* he writes that "The Castle stood on the west side of the present church, where a few years since a great quantity of Bones, some of which were Humane, and the rest the Bones of several kinds of Animals, besides strange old Spurs, Bridles, Swords, etc., was dug up. And 'tis on this side of the Town where there are still to be seen some Tokens of the Ditch that surrounded it in old Time." Finally Mr. Reade, whose description of the Grims Dyke has already been cited, has left notes of this also, written shortly before its final disappearance, in which he says that it "has the same feature as Grimes Dike of an earthwork raised by transport of its materials from a distance." Thus there is ample evidence of the recent existence of an embanked fortification at Benson of a similar form to that which still exists at Medmenham, and also of a boundary dyke of alternate bank and trench connecting the one with the other, parallel with the inner Grims Dyke which still runs between Henley and Mongewell. And the resemblance between these two boundary dykes becomes more complete when we note that as the inner one enclosed the cluster of springs which gives the name to Mongewell, so the outer one enclosed the still more valuable springs of Ewelme whence the brook flows out by Benson, giving the place in old times an alternative name Bensingburne.

The name of Medlers Bank at the one end challenges attention by its similarity to that of Medmenham at the other end; for a presumption arises that both belonged to the same people who were called Medlers or Medmen,—probably as being by race or perhaps merely by position "middlemen" between two other peoples. And this suggests the inference that, while a British remnant occupied the southern end of the Chilterns behind their Grims Dyke, these "midmen" were settled in the adjacent district, having their Medlers Bank as their limit northward; and as the Britons had their Henley down the river within the one bank, so these "Medmen" had their "ham" in the same position within the other bank. If this be the true account, it may further be inferred that when the Saxons in 571 captured the British village which became the "Bensingas-ton," and took possession of all the district northward, up the Thames as far as Eynsham and along the Chilterns as far as Aylesbury, the Britons were shut up within the corner of the hills and these "midmen" were dwellers between them and their conquerors.

For our present purpose the special interest of these two boundary dykes consists in the fact that there is attached to each of them on its inner or southern side a spot known as the Cuckoo Pen. In each case, too, it is at the strongest portion of the embankment where it ascends the western front of the hills in a prominent and exposed position. The one which belongs to the more northern bank, on Swyncombe Down, is perhaps the most striking of

all the numerous Cuckoo Pens of this district; and therefore both the spot itself and its surroundings will merit a detailed description. The name of Swyncombe,—whether it be from the swine that infested its woods or, as is more probable, from one Sweyn who possessed it,—implies a *combe* or hollow in the hillside; and the word enters into several place-names within a radius of a few miles from this, as Wycombe, Huntercombe, Watcombe, Postcombe, Holcombe. Though the word is British, and identical with the *cum* or *cwm* which occurs so frequently in Cumberland and Wales, the Saxons adopted it in their language; but its common occurrence is recognised as a plain indication that a considerable British remnant existed in the neighbourhood; for the Saxon would be likely to apply it, as a general rule, only to places which he heard so named by the Briton.

Swyncombe Down, as it is approached by the Icknield Way below it, makes as striking a picture as can well be found in the Chiltern scenery. It is one of those bold projections which look as if Nature had built them for the very purpose of forming bastions for the defence of the invaded natives. The front of this steep slope consists of a pair of rounded hills, looking almost artificial in their peculiar symmetry, like the twin towers flanking the gateway of a fortress. Up the front of these rises the dyke, in the form already described; and on reaching the summit it is carried on to form a defence along the northern edge of the open down

and through the thick beech-wood beyond till it reaches the main tableland of the hills. Midway upon the summit of the down, and just touching the verge of the dyke, is the circle of the Cuckoo Pen. It is enclosed in a rude triangle formed by two smaller dykes striking across from the main one. The circle is some fifty feet across, and is now chiefly marked by some recently planted beeches, among which are a few survivals of older growth; for from time immemorial it has been a little beech-grove. These are the only trees upon the ridge of the down, rising like a banner between the two heights of the hill-front as you approach from Ewelme, and forming a marked feature in the landscape as you look up from the farther parts of the valley. The tale of the Swyncombe villagers is that within this beech-grown circle the Philistines one day pent up the Cuckoo; but we are left to conjecture what race the legend would describe as Philistines and what fugitive may be its cuckoo. Then if we pass to the side of the down where a lateral ridge lies parallel with the main one on its southern and more accessible slope, we find traces of another ancient fortification with another quaint tradition. Almost hidden among the dark foliage of the junipers which grow luxuriantly along these slopes there is a clearly marked quadrangular earthwork. It is scarcely more than half the width of the Cuckoo Pen, and on considerably lower ground. Fragments of primitive pottery have been found about it, through the burrowing of abundant rabbits.

The tradition is that here the foundations of Swyncombe Church were dug; but eventually, they say, the other site was chosen, under the next ridge of hill on the south, where the little church of very early character stands at the present day. The length of the earthwork from east to west is a few feet greater than its width, and perhaps the western end is more distinctly angular while the eastern has its corners somewhat rounded, so that it presents a rude resemblance to the form of the church with its apsidal sanctuary; and this might possibly be the fanciful origin of the tale. But as the circle on the summit of the down is connected with the fortifications of the Briton, so the earthwork near its foot may have been occupied by the Saxon conquerors. And however worthless may be the story of the villagers it may yet hand down the fact that this lower entrenchment belonged to the same Saxon race who afterwards built churches along the hillside and very probably built the little church of Swyncombe itself. If therefore we have read these stories aright, the "Philistines" here were the invading Saxons, and the cuckoo whom they pent up was the beleaguered Briton.

Next let us pass southward again to the Grims Dyke which rises up the hills from Mongewell. Here on the summit of the broad ledge of elevated ground which reaches between the river-valley and the hill-front a field of about six acres adjoining the inner side of the dyke is known as the Cuckoo Pen. It lies towards the south-west in the angle where a

branch track descending from the Icknield Way cuts through the embankment. But in this case everything that may formerly have distinguished the plot from the surrounding fields has vanished entirely under the action of the plough. Yet the name survives; and as far as the different configuration of the ground admits, its position corresponds precisely with that of the well-preserved Cuckoo Pen on Swyncombe Down.

CHAPTER IX

A SERIES OF CHILTERN CUCKOO PENS

Several other places along the Chiltern Hills have their Cuckoo Pens, and they are of the same character as those which have been described in connection with the ancient embankments at Swyncombe and Mongewell. We shall find that in most cases, if not in all, the sites which they occupy are of considerable interest from the point of view of primitive antiquity. One is to be seen in the intermediate space between the two above mentioned, and in the parish of Ewelme. That village is well known in history as the home of William de la Pole, the exiled Duke of Suffolk, who was barbarously murdered at sea while crossing over into France in the reign of Henry VI., and whose widow built the very picturesque group of church, almshouses, and schools which adorns the village and beneath which springs the perennial brook that gives it the name of Ewelme, the *ea-welme*, or "water-wells." Ewelme Down is a projection of the hills similar to Swyncombe Down, but jutting out to a much shorter distance. It forms, in fact, the southern arm which encloses the "combe," as Swyncombe Down forms the northern arm; and a valley of less than a mile

in breadth, which seems to be described in a Saxon charter as "Fernfeld," lies between them, with the village of Swyncombe in the innermost angle. All the front of the slope of Ewelme Down is thickly grown with junipers, and the upper part has been planted with beech. At the outermost point of this plantation, and now enclosed within the gardens of a mansion which has recently been erected, there is a group of more prominent beech-trees, older too and more weather-beaten than those behind them, and until lately there were a few broken stumps of dead trees remaining among them. They stand as the straggling relics of what appears to have been a circle. This is the Cuckoo Pen. Its position is like that of its neighbour, save that it occupies the front point from which the hill slopes down on three sides; for Ewelme Down has no lengthened ridge like that of Swyncombe Down where the Cuckoo Pen is on a high point in the middle of it.

Again, a short distance northward from Swyncombe Down we come to Shirburn Hill, another abrupt projection very similar to Ewelme Down. It stretches out towards the village in which the picturesque turrets of the old moated castle, the home of the Earl of Macclesfield, rise among the trees and form the prominent feature. On this hill the traces of early fortifications which have been noted on Swyncombe Down repeat themselves, with differences which make the general resemblance all the more significant. There are large remains of an ancient dyke, grown with junipers, running up the

hollow on the north side of the hill and protecting a deeply excavated trackway which leads up into the ancient highway. Along the top of the down is a line of woods, edged with trenches which may or may not be ancient; and at the end of these, on the crown of the hill-front, just in the same position as the Ewelme Cuckoo Pen, we have a well-defined circular earthwork nearly two hundred yards in circumference. It is planted with beech and plane trees, among which a few stunted thorn-bushes survive; but the trees have not quite obliterated an inner circle or mound in the centre. This clump bears the name of the Cuckoo Pen; and the neighbours interpret the name to mean a trysting-place for lovers. But there can be no doubt of its antiquity; and in one detail its interest exceeds that of the other examples which have been described, since the circular entrenchment still remains. A short distance in front of it, on the descending brow of the hill, is a smaller circle, planted with beech and Scotch fir, box and juniper, and called also a Cuckoo Pen; but this was planted in imitation of the other and merely for ornament half a century ago, upon what had been the sheep common of the parish. The same thing was done about the same period, and the same title was applied, on the front of Beacon Hill, a little farther northward, at Lewknor. But this parish of Lewknor, which is important as giving its name to the Hundred, has also a true Cuckoo Pen on Bald Hill, an eminence between Shirburn Hill and Beacon Hill, though projecting less prominently than these;

and in this instance again there is a well-marked entrenchment which seems to be ancient.

Passing still northward beyond Beacon Hill we come to Crowell. Here a field is called the Cuckoo Pen, and the older inhabitants recollect that formerly the name belonged particularly to a little copse which existed in the field but which has been destroyed in recent times. It is possible that those who are acquainted with the line of the Chilterns as it passes on north-westward through Buckinghamshire may know other examples of the Cuckoo Pen in that county; but sufficient have now been noted to show what are the characteristic features of the spots which bear that title in this part of Oxfordshire.

Then if we pass back to the farther part of these hills, going southward from Grims Dyke and the Mongewell Cuckoo Pen, a breadth of little more than a mile brings us to an important trackway rising up from the river-bank and thus running parallel with the dyke. It is the continuation of the Berkshire Portway, as the Icknield Way is there called. It crosses the river by what is now Littlestoke Ferry; and while the Icknield Way of Oxfordshire diverges from it northward, we have this track keeping its direct course eastward. It passes along the highway of the village of Ipsden; then it survives for some distance as a mere footpath; and afterwards it climbs the hill-front in a steep ascent among the beech-woods, known from time immemorial as Berin's Hill. After this the

road passes on across the upland by Stoke Row and the Roman potteries, where the cherry-trees which the Romans imported still flourish in the orchards, and the very mode of grafting them which Roman writers describe is said to be still handed down as a treasured tradition. Eventually, by Witheridge Hill and Rocky Lane, the track seems to converge with the line of Grims Dyke near Grey's Court, so passing out of the district at Henley.

The steep rise called Berin's Hill takes its name from the famous missionary of the seventh century, St. Berin, of whom mention has already been made. He is said by an old tradition to have had a cell at this spot, which he used as one of the centres of his mission work from Dorchester. And it is a spot of remarkable interest in many ways. The Romans had some kind of military outpost here; and within the wood close by is an ancient well, built with large flints and carried down a great depth into the hillside. Local tradition and the judgment of antiquaries agree in regarding it as Roman work. Well Place is an old farmhouse in the hollow dene below the well; and here a recent owner found a gold coin of Cunobeline, marked with the British horse-ensign; and many British coins as well as Roman coins of several Emperors, from Augustus to Constantius, have been picked up round the spot. It became Bispesdon in Saxon times and Bishopton in later times, as being one of the manors belonging to the Dorchester bishopric. But there are remains also that carry us back to an earlier period. Berin's

Hill is remarkable for two tracks hollowed out deeply in the soil, while the ridge between them is occupied by a modern road which has superseded them. The inner track, on the right of the ascent, passes through the wood a few yards away and escapes observation if it be not looked for. The outer track is in part damaged and narrowed by the making of the new road close beside it; but its entire course remains, protected by a bank thrown out from it on the left, which separates it from the adjacent fields and woods. A few cottages stand beside this outer track, and the story of their older occupants is that one of the hollow ways was formerly used for ascent and the other for descent. Some have thought that they were dug out thus deeply in order to be covered in with boughs and hidden as secret passages between the hill and the valley; or it may be that their depth gave sufficient secrecy without such covering. But whatever may be the true account of their origin, there can hardly be a spot along the Chilterns marked with more curious relics of remote antiquity. Then if we pass to the point at which the two ways converge upon the summit, as they approach the crossing of the upper highway, there are two earth-circles between them, each with a low bank and shallow trench, measuring about fifteen yards across; the one planted with lofty Scotch firs which rise conspicuously above the surrounding woods, the other now cleared of the trees which recently covered it. The more prominent of these earth-circles,—or possibly

the pair of them, for the tradition is a little uncertain,—is the Ipsden Cuckoo Pen. In its position on the brow of the main ridge of the Chilterns it differs from the others, all of which are situated on projecting headlands.

The history of Ipsden Church seems to connect itself with the spot. It stands in an isolated position a short distance to the north of the village, where a second track-way on higher ground runs parallel with the track-way which we have noticed as running through the village in the hollow and up Berin's Hill; for in this district most of the old ways, like the Icknield Way itself, are double, with one line exposed to view and the other seeking concealment. Between the village and this second highway there was a Roman camp of which considerable traces existed until recent times; but the only surviving relic of it is one of its sides which became the church-mere and is now levelled down to a broad turf-way. At the northern end of it the beautiful little church of the close of the twelfth century was built, like other churches hereabouts, by the monks of Bec, who had been brought from Normandy by Milo Crispin, Lord of Wallingford, the owner of large possessions in this district. But it appears that previously the church of Ipsden had been upon high ground, like its neighbours at Nuffield and Checkendon; and therefore it must have been at or near the Cuckoo Pen. Then as the Britons in old time had used these wooded hills as a refuge when they were driven from the valley by

their Saxon conquerors, so the Saxons in their turn had collected here when they were ousted by the Normans; and at this time they were rallying their strength and making themselves dangerous. Hence arose the need of removing Ipsden Church from the upper woodland to the plain, where a prominent position was chosen well in view of the surrounding valley.

But the folklore of the village has a tradition of yet another site. Some two miles away southward, on the lower slope of Greenhill which projects over Ipsden westward from beyond Berin's Hill, there is a spot among the woods now included in the parish of Checkendon, known as the Devil's Churchyard. It has the same story which we have already noticed at Swyncombe, and which is also found at Benson and elsewhere. The people tried to build the church in this churchyard, but the devil demolished their work night after night and they were compelled to build it elsewhere. If the usual interpretation of the legend is accepted, we must infer that the Saxon missionary chose this site because the other had been associated with the pagan worship of his converts and he therefore desired to detach them from it, but the influences of paganism were too strong for him, and thus the churchyard where he attempted to build was claimed by the devil as his own, while the missionary was forced to take the other on the hill-top. And it is likely, also, that this place, where the Saxons had practised their heathen rites, would be a desecrated sanctuary of the Christian Britons

whom they had dispossessed. We have already seen that it was probably at or near the Cuckoo Pen, where also we have seen the further tradition that St. Berin had a cell or chapel. Thus the two entirely distinct traditions seem to fit in with each other and with the history.

There is at least one other Cuckoo Pen in this district. It is a mile or more south of Berin's Hill, and in the parish of Checkendon. A thickly-wooded projection known as Ape Hill juts out a little from the ridge; and up the front of this, from a point near Bottom Farm, rises a hollowed and embanked track, used as a bridle-way through the wood. There is a definite tradition that a copse or clump near this track was called the Cuckoo Pen: but though villagers of the last generation knew the spot it is not remembered now. The analogy of that at Ipsden, however, leaves little doubt about it. A circular clump enclosed by a hedge is prominent at the end of the open field into which the bridle-way of Ape Hill ascends, and just at the outer edge of the main ridge of the hills. Its position and character therefore mark it as corresponding with the series of Cuckoo Pens to the north of it, and we may conclude that like the rest it was the spot which the Briton had made his own.

In the name of the Hundred of Langtree, which includes these parishes of Mongewell, Ipsden, Checkendon, and others adjacent, we seem to have an illustration of the fact that we are on the meeting-ground of Saxon and Briton; for if the usual inter-

pretation is correct the Saxon adjective *lang* stands here with the British *tre*, the term for a dwelling or village, which forms a part of nearly a hundred of the village-names of Cornwall and appears occasionally throughout England and in many parts of the continent of Europe where the Celtic races have left their mark.

CHAPTER X

A BUCKINGHAMSHIRE CUCKOO PEN

To the east of the Chiltern Hills and just outside the limit of the Chiltern Hundreds there is the only Cuckoo Pen which the writer has been able to discover in the county of Buckingham. It is at the western end of the parish of Langley Marish,—properly Langley Maries, so called from the dedication of its church; and it is in the Hundred of Stoke. But before we examine it in detail the great historic and antiquarian interest of the district should be noted, especially as it relates to the facts of the Saxon conquest. The plot of ground to which the name of Cuckoo Pen has clung lies midway between the lines of two primitive tracks from east to west which at this point are little more than a mile apart. Their course is independent of the present high road from London which in all its course of nine miles across Buckinghamshire, between Colnbrook and Maidenhead, passes through no ancient village: only the modern Slough and its hamlet of Salt Hill have grown up on it; and Maidenhead, or Mydden-hythe, is not a town of great antiquity, but merely the middle hythe, or wharf, between Cookham and

Bray, those parishes having their common boundary in the High Street of the town.

Of the two neighbouring tracks which we have to notice, the more southern seems to be represented at first by a road which crosses the Coln out of Middlesex at West Drayton, passing through Thorney and Langley Marish, after which it is merged in the modern highroad and its ancient line has disappeared. But this lost line has been carefully traced in an article entitled *A Corner of Mercia* in Blackwood's Magazine of September 1887, which is largely followed in this chapter. The track led directly through Upton, Chalvey, Farnham End, and Cippenham,—a "chipping ham" or marketing village of Saxon times and a royal hunting-seat of Norman times; then by the ruined Burnham Abbey and by a farm which bears the significant name of Westown, called in the fourteenth century "la Westoune"; so to cross the Thames into Berkshire at Bray, the Roman Bibracte. And it should be noted that Richard King of the Romans, the younger son of King John, dating his foundation-charter of Burnham Abbey at Cippenham in 1266 and bestowing this manor upon it, mentions among the lands that he gives "the wood of la Strete," thus indicating that a Roman "Street" passed this way.

The track which follows a parallel course on the north of this enters the county at Iver and passes through another line of Saxon settlements,—Wexham, Stoke Poges, Farnham Royal, Britwell, Burnham and Hitcham, descending thence by

Cliveden, along a hollow way which can still be traced apart from the modern road, to the ferry which crosses to Cookham. Here within the sharp bend of the river was a British village of which much remains to be said in a later chapter, and the importance of the crossing at this point is proved by the discovery of a number of skeletons and of Roman swords and javelin-heads when a cut for a new channel of the river was made some years ago across the meadow. In this track, therefore, together with that which crossed to Bray, we seem to have another example, such as has been already observed, of a double way, the one line taking the lower ground near the river and the other taking the hilly ground, the one or the other offering the particular advantage which the exigencies of the hour might demand.

On the higher ground along which the more northern track passes we have the famous ancient forest of Burnham Beeches, and the beautiful park of Dropmore where bits of primeval woodland are intermixed with magnificent groves of pine and avenues of cedar, and the lofty line of chalk cliff of Cliveden where again modern wealth has only striven to add to the beauty of the slopes while leaving the ancient forest undisturbed. A few miles to the north-east we have the great oval British camp of twenty acres at Bulstrode ; and again a few miles to the north-west we have the cluster of British earthworks at Wycombe with the fine entrenchment of Desborough Castle giving its name

to the Hundred; and between these points is the town of Beaconsfield which seems to tell of the first felling of the beeches, as the slope leads up to the highest point of the Chilterns at Penn Beacon.

The southernmost portion of the Buckinghamshire Chilterns makes its south-western angle in the abrupt slope of Taplow Hill, overlooking the Thames in front of the ancient track which has been described. As the traveller crosses the river by Maidenhead Bridge, this eminence with the turrets of Lord Desborough's mansion appearing above the trees forms the prominent object close at hand on the north. The slopes in front of it bear the name of the Bury Fields; and it is recorded that when the Norman church of Taplow, which stood close to the mansion, was removed in the early part of the nineteenth century to be rebuilt in the village street, traces of the ditch and vallum of a British stronghold were uncovered. Close at hand is a bed of clay where the water is said never to fail; and this water not only supplied the fortress but appears also to have given rise to the name of the adjacent field, called the Bapses; for it is supposed that converts of St. Berin's mission in the seventh century received their baptism here. But of all the objects of antiquarian interest in this county perhaps none can claim to take precedence of the great tumulus, nearly fifteen feet high and about two hundred and forty in circumference, in the old churchyard. It was opened in 1883, and minute details of its character and contents were published

in the *Times* and elsewhere. The explorers found that the earth which composed it was full of remains left by previous occupants of the site. Worked flints and bone implements and bones which had been used for food, many fragments of rude Roman-British pottery and one of figured Samian ware, are described as having been heaped up in the mound. Beneath all this, on the level of the churchyard, was found the most splendid ancient burial that has ever been unearthed in southern England. A great grave, twelve feet in length and eight in width, had been dug to the depth of five feet in the hard gravel, and a layer of fine gravel had been spread over the floor of it. In this, under a covering of large wooden planks, had been laid the body of a chieftain, and from the position of the bones that remained it could be seen that he had been buried with his face towards the setting sun. His weapons and utensils had been placed around him. The relics of his clothing showed that he was buried in a woollen surcoat frilled with gold; and this was fastened with a clasp four inches long made of pure gold, richly chased, and set with garnets and ornaments of brilliant enamel. His belt of stamped leather also was fastened with two golden buckles. His hands had clasped a wooden shield encased with bronze and having an outer ring of iron, and on his arms had been bracelets of bronze with rims of gilded silver. His two-edged sword, thirty inches long, had been laid in its wooden sheath at his side; and there were also his iron dagger and his barbed javelin and

fragments of metal which may have been parts of his armour. Here were also the two buckets of his warship, placed one beside his head and the other beside his feet, flattened by the pressure of the earth, yet showing that they were made of wooden staves bound together with iron and encased with bronze like the shield, but this bronze had been embossed with a running ornament of horse-shoes,—emblems, it is presumed, of the Teutonic White-Horse deity. Supplies of food had been given him for his journey to the realms beyond the sunset; for a large bronze vase, twelve inches in height and more than twelve in width, with a massive handle on each side and a base loaded with lead, was set beside his head. Two drinking horns of great size, tipped with gilded bronze and lipped with gilded silver, were near his hands; and a smaller drinking horn with tip and lip all of silver was near his head and another near his feet. There were four broken vessels of thin sage-green glass of beautiful design and elaborate workmanship. There were also another knife of iron, and the bosses of two other shields, and a silver-gilt ornament of crescent shape. Some rings or beads of ivory pinned with silver were thought to be counters for a game that he might have pastime. Finally, over the planks that covered him was laid his spear with a barbed point and a socket of iron, pointing towards the west. It is said, by those who know, that his ornaments are Saxon,—certainly not, as was at first supposed, those of a Scandinavian Viking, and certainly not made in our

island but brought from the continent, for similar work is found in Merovingian tombs. Can we tell who he was? They say that Taplow is Tæpa's Hlaw. But it need not be assumed that the hill is named from the occupant of this grave. We shall presently see that there are some good reasons, at any rate, for thinking that he is a hero well known in history, and not the unknown Tæpa.

We must pass meanwhile southward to a point on the river-bank little more than a mile from Taplow Hill and just beyond the line of the other track which we have followed as far as its crossing to Bray. Here is Amerden Bank, and Amerden is a manor in the parish of Taplow. It was formerly known as Aumberdene; for in Taplow Church a very interesting brass of the fourteenth century commemorates "Nichole de Aumberdene, jadis pessoner de Londres," a member of the Fishmongers' Company. It has been supposed that this is probably one of the several place-names which preserve the memory of the Romanised Briton, Ambrose, or, to name him fully, Aurelius Ambrosius, the same whom the Welsh romancer, Geoffrey of Monmouth, called Myrdin, or Merlin, and whom some identify with the famous Uther, or Victor, called Pen-dragon or "chief dragon" from the imperial dragon-standard, and the father of King Arthur.

Ambrose is said to have been buried at Amesbury, formerly Ambres-byri, on Salisbury Plain. He also leaves his name in Essex, in the large camp

of Ambresbury Banks in Epping Forest. There is an Ambrose Farm in the parish of Nuffield on the other side of the Chilterns on the high road from Henley as it reaches the boundary of Bensington just above the crossing of the Icknield Way. Also in North Oxfordshire, close to the site of Aldchester and just off the Akeman Street, we have the village of Ambrosden. With this last the name of Aumberdene in Taplow appears to be identical. Ambrose was the successor of Vortigern,— whose name Vor-tigern perhaps means simply Overlord,—the unfortunate British chieftain who is said to have invited the aid of the Saxons against the Picts and Scots, with results which are well known. When the Saxon helpers proved to be even more terrible enemies than the others, the Britons, harassed beyond endurance, rallied themselves to a vigorous effort of resistance under the leadership of Ambrose. His first victory is said to have been gained in 466, and he led his forlorn hope for nearly fifty years.

It is a commonplace of our history books to regard the Saxon conquest as the result of a series of sporadic incursions,—groups of fighting men crossing the Channel in their warships with their wives and children, taking possession of some portion of the soil, and adopting it thenceforward as their home. Piratical incursions had been continuous, even under the Roman rule. But none can fail to realise the extreme difficulty, to say the least, of effecting permanent settlements of families by such methods, in the face of tribes practised as the Britons

were in the art of defensive warfare; and it has been reasonably questioned whether such a form of conquest is conceivably possible. In a recent work by Major Godsal, *The Storming of London and the Thames Valley Campaign*, it has been forcibly argued that both antecedent probability and the facts that are known to us point to a very different conclusion. There is ample evidence, it is urged, that the invasion was deliberately planned and organised on a large and comprehensive scale by some master mind, and was carried to its successful issue under the guidance of a leader of consummate skill and courage.

It must be remembered that while the invaders are commonly called, both among Romans and Britons, by the name of Saxons, yet it was in fact an invasion of the English or Angles; and it was by no mere accident, or capricious turn of events, that these gave their name to our island. Large numbers of their neighbours, both Saxons and Jutes, who were allied to the Angles though they had now become distinct nations, crossed over with them. The Romans had come into contact with the Saxons, who occupied the southernmost district of the three; while the Angles and Jutes were almost unknown names to them: hence they were accustomed to speak of the whole group as Saxons. When they appointed an officer to defend the east coast of Britain, they called him Count of the Saxon Shore, though it was against the Angles that his protection was chiefly needed.

Bede, himself a Northumbrian and therefore presumably an Angle, tells us that the Angles came from "the country which is called Angulus," that it was "between the provinces of the Jutes and the Saxons," and that it "is said to have remained from that time unto this day a desert." His account, therefore, implies that the conquest of Britain was a complete and absolute migration of the entire English nation into our island. These Angles, from their position in what we now call Schleswig, had access to the sea both by the Baltic and by the Elbe, and were outside the reach of Roman influence. They would naturally make use of these advantages when they were pushed forward in the moving of the nations. Moreover they are known to have possessed the most perfect and highly developed organisation of any of the Teutonic nations. The Saxons lived under a merely tribal system, each tribe being ruled by its own chieftain, and one of these chieftains being chosen by lot when events demanded union under a single leader. But the Angles were organised under their King. This circumstance explains how it came about that the kingly system obtained from the first in England, the Saxons being content to adopt the fashion of the Angles; and the same circumstance may explain also how the invasion was planned and executed, if it so happened that at this period the King of the Angles was a man of exceptional talent and power. As Major Godsal writes: "It may have been Wihtgils, the father of Hengist and Horsa, or Elesa or

Esla, the father or grandfather of Cerdic, or more likely still some progenitor of Ida of Northumbria, since . . . it was probably to the north of Britain that the bulk of the Angles with their King eventually migrated."

In 449, according to the Chronicle, Hengist and Horsa landed at Wippedsfleet. This has been universally identified with Ebbsfleet in the Isle of Thanet at the extreme eastern end of Kent; and though Kent was eventually occupied by Jutes, we need not doubt that these first chieftains were Angles. Nor need we stay to consider whether these are truly historic names or merely two mythical representatives of the horse-ensign personified in the old sagas from which the Chronicle was compiled in the ninth century. The Chronicle must tell the tale. In 455 these two chieftains fought with Vortigern, and Horsa was slain, at Aylesford. It is a ford on the Medway, and they had advanced to mid-Kent. The next year Hengist and Æsc his son slew four thousand Britons at Crayford, and the fugitives escaped to London Burgh, Kent being given up to the invaders. Crayford is near the south bank of the Thames and only thirteen miles from London Burgh, which was doubtless also south of the Thames,—the "Borough," or Southwark,—the London of Middlesex being of later date. Its position on the river, which made it the great mercantile centre of the island, must have given it a strategic importance also; and this mention of it as the place where the defeated Britons sought refuge implies as

much. We may note, too, that it is one of the places which retain their Celtic names; Lynddin, or the Lake Fort, having become Londinium. But we hear no more of it now, for the Chronicle of the Conquest is silent for nine years. When King Alfred compiled it he could find, we must presume, no records of this period. The next incident in the Chronicle is in 465. Hengist and Æsc fought the Britons at Wippedsfleet, where twelve British leaders fell, and also the Saxon Wipped from whom the place was named. It has been thought that as the other Wippedsfleet became known as Ebbsfleet, so this one may be connected with Epping and may explain the presence of Ambrosius at Ambresbury Banks in Epping Forest. In any case, during the nine unrecorded years it cannot be doubted that London had been captured. The next entry in the Chronicle relates that in 473 Hengist and Æsc fought against the Welsh and took spoils innumerable, and the Welsh fled from the Angles as from fire; but no place is named. Major Godsal attaches much significance to the two places called Walton, or Welshtown. At Walton-on-the-Hill the ground is sloping up towards the high range between Dorking and Reigate; while only four miles beyond it the River Mole curves round northward, and just beyond its outflow is Walton-on-Thames. The position of Kingston-on-Thames, a short distance above that point, is also significant. We may imagine Hengist and Æsc reigning there while the Briton faced them at the Waltons. When the Britons were driven

from London up the river, the first position on which they could defend themselves would be on the rising ground which ascends from Walton-on-Thames, with the River Mole in front and the River Wey behind; and this rise extends for three miles southward to culminate in the abrupt height of St. George's Hill, two hundred and fifty feet above the sea-level, with a British camp on its summit. Was the unnamed battle-ground of 473, where innumerable spoils were taken and whence the Britons fled as from fire, this eminence of St. George's Hill?

Bede tells us that Ælla, the first King of the South Saxons, was the first man who obtained that leadership among the several Sovereigns which belonged next to Ceaulin of Wessex, and then passed in turn to Ethelbert of Kent, to Redwald of East Anglia, and to Edwin and Oswald and his brother Oswy of Northumbria. It is the paramount dignity which was designated by the title of Bretwalda, the "Wielder" or Sovereign of Britain; though it is questioned whether that title was actually borne by Ælla. Further, Ælla is the only one of the Kings of the various kingdoms whose descent is not traced from Woden. In other words, he was not recognised as a scion of the royal stock, but appears to be one who made his own way to pre-eminence. The first thing that is recorded of him is that in 477 he landed at Cymens-ora with his three sons, Cymen, Wlensing and Cissa. His sons,—by which we are probably to understand merely followers who called him their "father,"—left their names, Cymen at

Cymens-ora, which is taken to be Keynor, Wlensing at Lancing near Shoreham, and Cissa at Cissa-ceaster or Chichester. So began the South-Saxon kingdom; and it is noteworthy that when the Roman city of Regnum, which dominated the district, fell to the Saxons, it took its new name from Cissa, and not, as we should have expected, from Ælla. Then for twelve years Ælla is not named again. But in 485, says the Chronicle, he fought with the Welsh near the bank of the Mearcrædsburn. And in 491 Ælla and Cissa besieged Andredsceaster and slew all the Britons there; for we were told that at their landing, fourteen years before, while many Britons were slain, many fled to the wood called Andreds-lea. Their place of refuge in the Andredsweald, and the siege of Pevensey, and the utter defeat of the Britons there, have been fully described in a previous chapter.

The facts, therefore, that we can gather relating to Ælla's life are not numerous. He gained a great victory on his landing in Sussex; he fought a battle at a place called Mearcrædsburn eight years later, but it is not described as a victory; and after six years more he captured Andredsceaster and defeated the Britons of the Andredsweald. Further he was King of the smallest of the Saxon kingdoms; and though the settlements of his three sons appear in Sussex he leaves no trace of his own name there. He died, if we follow Henry of Huntingdon, in 514. Yet to this man, with no princely claim, is accorded a dignity in which some of the greatest of the Kings

and warriors for two centuries were proud to follow him. Meanwhile it must be remembered that Hengist and his son Æsc were conducting the campaign up the Thames; for they were associated together as leaders at Crayford in 456 and also in two great victories which have been assigned the one to a spot in Epping Forest in 465 and the other to St. George's Hill in 473. Probably Hengist retired into Kent soon afterwards, for in 488, says the Chronicle, Æsc succeeded to the kingdom of the Kentishmen. It was not until 495 that the next great leader, Cerdic, with Cynric his son, landed at Cerdicsore and thus laid the foundation of the West-Saxon kingdom, planting in our land the stock which still lives in the royal family of England.

With all these facts in view Major Godsal works out his very interesting conclusions in regard to the personality and history of Ælla. He infers that he was a young follower of Hengist and Horsa, and that his power and courage as a soldier brought him to the front, very probably in the storming of London. The facts suggest further that while the Kings were leading their army up the Thames Ælla became the great organiser of the campaign, since there is no other reasonable way of accounting for his rank as Bretwalda. But the plan of the conquest demanded the landing of an adequate force on the south coast to co-operate with that upon the Thames; and for this purpose Ælla crossed to the homeland and brought over the three warships of his followers in 477. His victory in 485 is probably the occasion

when he joined forces with Æsc, the Mark-redes-burn being probably in the Thames district and very possibly the Battle-bourne at Windsor. Hengist having now retired to Kent it is probable that Ælla undertook the chief leadership on the Thames. He went southward afterwards, in 491, to join with Cissa in subduing the last refuge of the Britons in the Andredsweald, and thus the whole south-eastern portion of the island became the possession of the English; but it is improbable that he ever retired into Sussex, although, as the leader of the South Saxons at their coming, he may have continued to be nominally their King. Lastly, the Aumberdene on the Thames bank opposite Bray suggests the thought that Ælla may well have fought his last battle with Ambrose here, before Cerdic came to the front as the chief leader of the invaders. But up to this first angle of the Chiltern district the valley of the Thames had now been secured; and who is so likely to have been honoured with the magnificent burial on the prominent hill of Taplow, overlooking the scene of conquest, as Ælla?

We have now to follow upward the parallel tracks which have been already described, the one from behind Taplow Hill and the other from a point in front of Amerden. A course of about six miles brings us to the boundary of Langley Marish. Here a road running south-westward from Uxbridge crosses the one track on the east of Wexham and meets the other track at Upton. There is also a brook flowing through Wexham which meets the

road and runs alongside it to Upton and so southward to the Thames above Windsor. It forms the parish boundary between Langley and Upton, dividing the "lang lea" of the one parish from Upton Lea in the other. But almost immediately after the road and the brook have met they are again parted for a short distance, and while the road continues its direct course the brook curves away to the westward. The area which they enclose is about an acre and a half of pasture, divided into unequal parts by a private roadway to Upton Lea. The northern and smaller part has the significant name of Hundred Acre, suggesting that it must have had some special relation to the Stoke Hundred, perhaps as the meeting-place of the Hundred Moot. The second portion, measuring something less than an acre, is the Cuckoo Pen. The distinction between them is emphasised by the fact that while the other is freehold the Cuckoo Pen is copyhold of the manor of Langley. The ground rises a few feet on each side of the brook, and all analogy would lead us to look for a Cuckoo Pen on that rising ground rather than in the hollow. In fact we shall presently see that the pen properly means the head of the ground and when its true sense was lost the countryfolk assumed that it meant an enclosure. It may be fairly conjectured, therefore, that a spot upon this rise was known as the Cuckoo Pen and that the name clung to the enclosure on the lower ground because it conveyed no other intelligible meaning. In the next instance that we have to notice the same

transfer of the name has actually taken place within living memory. But in the case now before us the point of special interest is the fact that here are two ancient ways traversing South Buckinghamshire a mile apart, each leading to an important British site on the Thames bank and each marked with a line of Saxon settlements; and between them, upon a brook which they cross half-way along their course, we find a Cuckoo Pen. All this agrees with the conclusion to which the other instances have pointed, that a Cuckoo Pen is a spot occupied by the Briton.

CHAPTER XI

SOME THAMES-SIDE CUCKOO PENS

Cerdic of the royal family of the Angles and Cynric his son landed in 495 at Cerdicsore, which appears to be part of the shore of the Solent. The Chronicle goes on to tell us that another party landed at Portsmouth in 501, that some great victories were gained, and that in 514 the West Saxons came to Britain with three ships and landed at Cerdicsore. Five years later Cerdic and Cynric were acknowledged as Kings of the West Saxons. Within a few years of their arrival the Roman city of Clausentum near the coast must have yielded to them, and Venta Belgarum, or Winchester, soon afterwards. Perhaps they had already taken the mighty inland fortress of Calleva Atrebatum, or Silchester. Then in 552 they defeated the Britons at Old Sarum, and five years later they gained another victory at Barbury on the northern edge of the Wiltshire Downs. Thus we note how slow but sure was their progress. The fall of Andredsceaster in 491 had made them masters of the whole of the south-eastern portion of the island, and about the same period they had secured the Thames Valley as far as the outer fringe of the Chilterns. Now, sixty-five years

later, they have gained possession of the whole of the central part of southern England as far as the great ridge which runs from the Thames and the end of the Chilterns westward across what we know as Berkshire and Wiltshire. In 571 the time had come when they were able to seize the Upper Thames Valley and to advance beyond it northwards.

Cerdic had died in 534, and Cynric in 560, his son Ceaulin succeeding him. While Ceaulin was pushing his conquests towards the north-west, the advance along the central district was led by his brother Cuthwulf, who, as the Chronicle relates, "fought with the Brit-welsh at Bedcanford and took four towns, Lygeanbirg and Ægelesbirg, Bænesington and Egonesham; and the same year he died." Thus we learn that they crossed the river—whether at Wallingford, as is commonly supposed, or at any rate in this immediate neighbourhood—and pushed forward along the Chilterns, as it would seem as far as Bedford (if Bedcanford is rightly identified, but this is doubtful), before the forces of the Britons could concentrate against them. There they gained a decisive victory which resulted in the submission of four important British towns. Whether the first of these is Leighton Buzzard, or Luton, or Limbury, in the same neighbourhood, or Lenborough near Buckingham—for all these have been claimed for it—there is no doubt about Aylesbury and Bensington and Eynsham. Cuthwulf thus added to the West-Saxon kingdom a large

district along the front of the Chilterns and up the River Thames, its southernmost point being Bensington where the hills approach the river.

The village of Bensington, or Benson as it has been commonly called for some centuries, runs up from the river-bank upon a long gravel ridge which juts out from the Chilterns, having on either side of it a wide stretch of what was formerly marshland. Along the southern side of the gravel ridge, and through the village, the clear and sparkling brook runs its course of two miles from the front of the hills at Ewelme. Where this brook approaches the river an enclosed meadow along its northern bank is now called the Cuckoo Pen. But the older inhabitants say that in their younger days the term belonged to a piece of waste ground rising to a higher level on the opposite side of the brook, which has since been enclosed and forms allotment gardens and a recreation ground. Where a hedge crosses between these there is a slight elevation of the ground, not readily explained by the nature of the subsoil, but rather suggesting a conjecture that the spot may have been crowned by an ancient earthwork which has been so nearly levelled as to be hardly recognisable. No tangible tradition attaches itself to the Cuckoo Pen here. It is said to be so called because the cuckoo is first heard hereabouts each year; which is likely enough, since the largest cluster of trees adjoining the village is near the spot. But it is certainly a spot of archæological interest, even if the suspicion of a mound

upon it is insufficient to prove it so. Each of the four towns which Cuthwulf captured must have had its fortified stronghold, though it were of nothing more than earth and palisades. And if we look for the one point about Bensington where the primitive inhabitants would be most likely to protect their settlement, we can find none more probable than this knoll rising sharply from the south side of the brook and near the point of its junction with the river. We may recall too the tumulus at the outflow of the next brook southward, at Mongewell, and also the great British embankments at the outflow of the next tributary above this, at Dorchester, presently to be noticed. Moreover, human remains have been found a few yards away from this point at Benson, and also a third-brass coin of Constantine II. But when, after the Saxon victory, the tribe of the Bensingas chose a spot for their "ton," it was a furlong away from this, on the north side of the brook; and at that point they threw up their Medlers Bank which has been already described, with its long line of ditch and bank running across to Medmenham.

Two miles north-west of Bensington, and originally included in the same parish as well as in the royal manor, is the village of Warborough. In the thirteenth century it was written Wardburg, and its name suggests a fortified outpost on the border of the King's domain. An important trackway from Dorchester to the Chilterns crosses the village, passing by the church, which is mainly an edifice of

King John's time, and along the village green, and thence to the British "wick" of Berrick. There is abundant evidence of primitive occupation at Warborough; for in the level cornfields west of the village, between this track-way and the river, numerous circular outlines of primitive pit-dwellings have revealed themselves in dry seasons. But for our present purpose there is a special interest in the low ridge of hill that rises along the north side of the old track-way. It is known as Town Hill, and an isolated pair of trees on the summit may be assumed to mark the site of the Saxon "ton." Along the length of the ridge runs a field-track, parallel with the lower one; and it must have been anciently of some importance, for it is strongly embanked up its first ascent eastward from the Thame stream which flows beyond it. The village street of Warborough runs up the southern front of this ridge of hill on its more eastern part, and as it approaches the old cross-track upon the summit its direction is remarkable; for without any apparent reason it curves widely round towards the west so as to form a large segment of a circle. The ground which it thus embraces is a large orchard, and this is known as the Cuckoo Pen. On the eastern side of it there was until recently a footpath leading down from the upper track to the lower and emerging by the churchyard; and the ditch which still protects the Cuckoo Pen on this side wears all the aspect of an ancient boundary. The tradition of the name at Warborough is worth no more than at Bensington,

except that it preserves something of a connection with past times and indicates that there was a particular spot in the orchard to which the designation of Cuckoo Pen more properly applied. The story is that in a corner of the orchard there was once a pen where the cuckoo appeared each year. But in this instance again there is ample reason for regarding the Cuckoo Pen as the spot which the Britons occupied. And it is significant also that on this eastern side of the village the lower fields nearer to the river bear the name of the Bury Fields. The term "burh" is applied to any stronghold whether of the Saxon or of the Briton; and the nearest fortified spot to which these fields could belong would be the rising ground about the Cuckoo Pen. And when we find the Saxon "ton" dominating this from the higher part of the ridge beyond, the influence is obvious that the Cuckoo Pen here as elsewhere represents the British stronghold.

Next above Warborough is Dorchester, lying between the Thame or Isis and the tributary Thame, and commonly supposed to derive its name from its situation, as Dwr-chester, the water-camp. So the older antiquaries understood it, and Leland in his Swan Song fancifully latinised it as Hydropolis, to make it fit his verse. More recent etymologists say that it is not from the Welsh *dwr*, but that it means the "strong camp," from a British word akin to the Latin *durus* and appearing in many Roman-British names, as in Durovernum, Durobrivæ and Durocornovium. The village, lying on the right bank of

the Thame stream half-a-mile above its outflow into the Thames, shows the clear outline of a rectangular Roman camp, with the lines of its streets still traceable in the zigzag highroad and the adjoining lanes and footpaths. Here have been found the tessellated pavements of Roman houses, numerous Roman coins as well as gold coins of Cunobeline, fragments of Samian ware and other pottery, and a Roman altar dedicated to Jupiter and the deity of Augustus. Remains of burnt corn and bones, the relics of a pagan sacrifice, have been discovered under a Roman pavement within the abbey church; and a large burial urn with ashes and two glass vessels enclosed in it has been dug up in the neighbouring garden of the vicarage. But the most striking of all the antiquities of Dorchester is the great double embankment of the "Dyke Hills" between the village and the river,—a ditch of sixty feet in width between two lofty banks, with a smaller ditch on either side, running for about nine hundred yards from the river-bank to meet the Thame tributary a few yards above its outflow, and thus enclosing a broad semicircle of meadow which would form an island when the ditch was flooded; and the Roman camp lies a quarter of a mile to the north of it. We might have expected that some legend of the penning of the cuckoo would appear in connection with these earthworks; but if it ever existed no recollection of it is forthcoming now.

But we find one in the hamlet of Burcote, close above Dorchester. The place is unknown to history,

except as the last point to which the navigation of the Thames extended until the passing of an Act of Parliament in 21 James I. by which the river was opened from Burcote to Oxford. The first barge arrived at Oxford in the summer of 1635. Previously none could get there, except such as could be hauled up the "falls" by a winch or capstan on the bank, and on its return it must be allowed to drift down the "falls" as best it might. One of the lanes at Burcote leading up from the river-bank to the high road is still pointed out by the villagers as the way by which in the old days wine and other merchandise was brought up from the barges to be conveyed by waggons to Oxford. Going back to earlier times, there is a Saxon charter defining the boundaries of Wittenham as given by King Ethelred to Ethelwulf and by him to Abingdon Abbey in the ninth century. It mentions as the western boundary a "highway to the Thames northward"; and it all corresponds with the present boundary as far as the highway extends; but it proves that where this now turns off abruptly it was formerly continued forward to the river. Its course was obviously by Northfield Farm, where a pre-historic settlement with abundance of interesting remains has been found; and the point at which it crossed the river was obviously Burcote. Thence it would proceed in the direction of Baldon, passing near the site on which the Ordnance Map indicates a Roman villa. The Burcote Cuckoo Pen is merely a little enclosure in the village, between the highroad

and the river, where nothing appears to make it remarkable; but it is noteworthy that it lies close to these sites of early occupation and close to the point where the river was crossed by a primitive track which the Saxons used. Burcote, it should be noted, is not "Burh-cote," but a corruption, through "Birdcot," of the older form "Bridecote" which we have in documents of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and which still survives as a family name in the neighbourhood. Can it be that the true name is "Britcot," a cot of the Briton, dominated as it is by the adjacent Clifton of the Saxon?

CHAPTER XII

TWO BERKSHIRE CUCKOO PENS

In the near neighbourhood of the group of Oxfordshire Cuckoo Pens there is one spot bearing the same designation on the Berkshire side of the Thames, opposite to Dorchester. It is in the parish of Brightwell, where its important position will best be understood by taking note of the geography. In the middle of the wide valley which stretches from the Chilterns to the Berkshire Downs the malmstone of the Upper Greensand rises into a ridge which becomes the more prominent by contrast with the dead level of the gault clay lying about its western and southern sides and the river flowing close beneath it on the north. Eastward it slants gradually down for two miles to reach the level at Wallingford. The villages of Brightwell and Sotwell with Slade End—the end of the "slad" or valley—lie together below the southern slope. Westward the ridge culminates in the two rounded eminences of the Wittenham Hills. The more northern of these is Harp Hill—so called, as Hearne tells, "from its seeming at some distance to be in the shape of a Welch Harp": the other, of almost equal height, is Castle Hill, known in the sixteenth

WITTENHAM HILLS

FROM BRIGHTWELL MOOR END.

century as Sinodun, which some antiquaries explain to mean the hill upon the water; but others have urged that it is Synod-down, and this may connect itself with the name of Wittenham if that is to be interpreted as the "ham" or enclosure of the Witan. Each of the two summits is crowned with a large clump of beech-trees, making them a conspicuous landmark. Few spots preserve the ancient conditions of our country more completely than Wittenham Wood which clothes some ninety acres of the slope of Castle Hill, reaching down to the river. Here are several of the rarer plants,—buck-bean and bur-marigold, tway-blade and butterfly-orchis. And here is also a hiding-place for the white stoat, the polecat, and the badger, and in fact for all sorts of our native carnivora. The goosander, the merganser, the pin-tail duck, and almost every kind of duck that frequents our shores, has been known here along the riverside: the hawfinch and the green woodpecker are in the wood; the bittern has been seen taking refuge here, and even a cormorant has appeared within the memory of man; the rare nutcracker has been known here in recent years; and on the beeches of the hill-top the peregrine falcon may often be seen watching for the wood-pigeons and striking them down as they fly across the valley. So tenaciously does the hill keep its primeval character.

Castle Hill is so called from a large and deep entrenchment, enclosing a few acres of arable ground upon the summit, with the beech-clump in the centre.

It appears to be a British camp altered and adapted by the Romans; and a Roman key and coins of the Emperors have been found on the hill. The soil under the beeches is strangely ridged in parallel lines, which some think to be a relic of former tillage, but traditionally they are "soldiers' graves." A hollow in the fosse, known as the "money pit," has the reputation of containing a buried treasure, and the villagers tell of one who attempted to search it, but when he had dug to a great depth and found an iron chest a raven appeared upon it, crying, "He is not born yet!" So the explorer knew that it was not for him to make the discovery.

Adjoining the Wittenham Hills on the east, as the ridge descends, is Brightwell Hill; and upon its high ground above the river a tribe called the Shillings appears to have settled at the Saxon conquest. They left their name on the brook which skirts the eastern edge of Wittenham Wood; for it is called "Scillinges-broc" in the charter of Ethelred in the ninth century, granting Wittenham to Abingdon Abbey. They left their name also in the ford a mile below, where it is still retained in the hamlet of Shillingford across the river. The charter just mentioned calls the ridge "Caberes-bæc"—Caber's Back; and in a charter of the tenth century, recording King Eadred's gift of Brightwell to his thegn Athelgard, who bestowed it on the New Minster at Winchester, this name is given in the corrupted form of "Gaferbice." Where this ridge of Brightwell Hill rises to its highest point we have a well-

preserved barrow under a small clump of beech-trees.

The next object to be noticed is the Roman road from north to south which crosses here along a depressed hollow between Brightwell Hill and Castle Hill. This road has already been described as branching off from the Akeman Street at Allchester and passing down the middle of Oxfordshire. Reaching the Roman camp of Dorchester it continued between the end of the prehistoric Dyke Hills and the outflow of the Thame tributary, which has now somewhat altered its course in the meadow. There the road crossed the Thames and ascended the hill-side. Gatecliff is the designation of the spot in the Wittenham charter. The track is still preserved, rising from the river-bank and going over the ridge. Beyond the brow of the high ground there is no sign of it for a mile or more; but the line which it followed across the fields is obvious. We take it up again at Brightwell Moor-end on the highroad into North Moreton, whence it proceeded to the Roman town of Spinae, the modern Speen; and a branch thrown off from it south-eastward, to meet the river-crossing of another Roman way at Streatley, is still to be seen in a grass track along the edge of Brightwell Parish. In a charter of King Eadwy in 957, confirming Eadred's grant to Athelgard, the "street" is named as the boundary all the way from the river, as it still divides Brightwell from Little Wittenham at one end and from North Moreton at the other end. The line of the street as it descended

the southern front of the hill would pass close to the spot known as Redgate Farm, on which only a barn remains. A little further west, under the foot of Castle Hill, is a small field bearing the name of Bloody Mere, so called from a mere-bank which has been levelled away within living memory. From this field there is an ancient track deeply cut out of the hillside and ascending by a sharp angle to the entrenched fortress above. The name of Bloody Mere carries with it a story that the blood of warriors slain upon the hill ran over it; and this tradition of a sanguinary battle upon Castle Hill has been very definitely handed down among the villagers of Wittenham. Here between Redgate—the red way—and Bloody Mere, on the line of the Roman street and at the point where the ancient track from the British fortress descended into the valley, is the field of nearly forty acres which has acquired the name of the Cuckoo Pen. It lies against the side of the road running from east to west between Wallingford and Wittenham. In its character and appearance there is nothing to distinguish it from the adjoining fields. But here again it may well be that the true Cuckoo Pen was on the adjacent rising ground and that the name has been preserved on a plot which was formerly enclosed between Bloody Mere and Redgate.

The point of prominent interest in the surroundings of this field is of course Castle Hill, or Sinodun, rising over it on the north-west. In a previous chapter mention has been made of the leading part

which some antiquaries believe it to have played in the Roman invasion as the hill which Aulus Plautius fortified for the protection of the Dobuni. Its strategic importance in this district is still more forcibly illustrated by an event of a later period which therefore may be fitly noticed here. When Offa was pushing his conquests southward and defeated Cynewulf of Wessex at Bensington in 777, he added to the Mercian kingdom the whole of the valley of the Thames as far as the Berkshire Downs; and the early records of Abingdon Abbey tell us that he planted a fortress on the hill of "Witham," near the spot where nuns from Helenstow at Abingdon had settled and from which the advent of the soldiers compelled them to move away. Offa's obvious purpose was to secure his newly-acquired territory. Wytham Hill beyond Oxford has commonly been taken to be the site; but it fails entirely to meet the conditions of the story. Wittenham is "Witeham" in Domesday Book, and it meets the case exactly; for Castle Hill overlooks all the valley which Offa had won. And on the western part of the hill large pieces of building stone have been found, in a field known locally as "Old Oxford," which may reasonably be supposed to be "Offa's Fort."

Returning now to the Cuckoo Pen, which lies under the south-eastern side of the hill, we find nothing to connect it with the capture of the fortress by Plautius in the older days or with that by Offa in later times. But in the conquest of the Roman-Britons by the Saxons in their advance northward

in 571 its position at the hill-foot and close against the Roman road from the south-west would necessarily be one of first importance. Let it be remembered that the Saxons already occupied the ridge of the Berkshire Downs and that in this year they crossed the Thames and occupied a wide district on the north of it, including what we know as Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire, where the four leading towns of the Britons submitted to them, the nearest of these towns being Bensington and the next Eynsham. It is commonly supposed that they would cross the river at the noted "ford of the Welshmen," Wallingford. That ford is at the eastern end of the valley, at the point where the river meets the edge of the Chilterns and just above the point where it breaks through between those hills and the Berkshire Downs. Then Bensington would be two miles farther up the valley, and here at once the southern river-bank slopes up to Castle Hill which stands three miles beyond up the centre of the valley. Bensington and the lands of the Upper Thames to Eynsham could never be the Saxon's possession till they had dislodged the Briton from Castle Hill. Its capture must be their final effort before they crossed the river.

It is easy to work up a conjectural picture of the scene. Here is a great stronghold which the Saxons must have secured before they could proceed. Here is the highroad by which they must have approached it, and here is the hollow way which its defenders must have guarded, and at the foot of this is the spot

where field-names as well as traditions tell of the sanguinary battle which must have happened here. Here too is the clan of the Shillings whose name appears on the brook at one end of Brightwell Hill and on the ford at the other end; and we may fairly suppose that they had taken a leading part in the conflict and then made a permanent home here. Here again is the barrow on the hill-top, and it may well be the burial-place of a chieftain of the Shillings who fell in the battle. And here is the name of the ridge, Caber's Back, which may well be another survival of the same chieftain's memory. And from this the Roman highway passed on across the river.

It is worth while here to recall the fact that we have already noticed the next ancient track above this, leading round the western edge of the Wittenham Hills and crossing direct to the Cuckoo Pen which was last described on the Oxfordshire bank at Burcote.

It can hardly be thought likely that Cuthwulf would divide his forces, and send part of them against Eynsham, which was then the dominant town in what we know as West Oxfordshire, just as Bensington was in the southern part. But a curious coincidence appears in the fact that the only other Cuckoo Pen which the writer has been able to discover in Berkshire is on an ancient track descending from the downs through the Vale of White Horse and over the River Ock, in a northward course which, wherever it may have crossed the Thames, points direct towards Eynsham. It leaves the ridge of hills

at the great British earthwork of Sagbury, or Letcombe Castle, and comes down by Wantage, anciently Waneting, the settlement of a Saxon tribe of Wanetings, famous in history as the birth-place of King Alfred and well adorned recently by a noble statue of him in the market-place. A little further west along the ridgeway we have the most notable group of prehistoric antiquities which the county possesses. There is the White Horse on the hill-front, formerly supposed to be Alfred's work but recognised now as a Celtic device wrought by the Briton long before Saxon days; and in modern times Thomas Hughes has made its scouring famous. There is the grim entrenchment of Uffington Castle rising behind it; a mile east of this is the perforated Blowing Stone, Alfred's Bugle-horn, which once stood on the hill-top to summon the tribes but is now carried down into the valley to edify visitors at the wayside inn at Kingston Lisle. Again, a mile westward on the ridgeway there is the British cromlech of Wayland's Smithy, another Saxon landmark, with its weird legend of the mysterious forger of horse-shoes from the underworld; and if such work has now passed into the hands of more mundane blacksmiths we know at any rate the story of Queen Elizabeth's days, how Tressilian with Flibbertigibbet for his guide laid his groat on the flat stone of the pile and got Whitefoot shod.

The Cuckoo Pen upon the track that has been mentioned is in the parish of Marcham—the *hamm*, or enclosure (as Professor Skeat tells us), on the

march, or boundary. Marcham gives its name to the Hundred and carries our minds back to the time when this was the border presumably between Wessex and Mercia, or possibly even between Saxon and Briton; and to this parish belong two hamlets, Garford and Frilford. Garford, anciently Garanford, on the Ock, is the ford of the *gar*, or gore,—a triangle of land between the river and its southern tributary, the Childrey brook, or Childrith. Upon the middle of the triangle rises an ancient barrow, which yielded to its explorers a British urn and human bones, glass beads, flint chips, and an iron ring. Near the village is the site of an early settlement, now Blackington or Black-town, but marked only by a farm shed and a copse.

From Garford a footbridge, known as Gang-bridge which we may take to be Garan-bridge, crosses the Ock to Frilford, and a pathway passes on by a raised causeway towards that hamlet. Close to this causeway an unenclosed field by the riverside is the Cuckoo Pen. It is therefore in Frilford. This was anciently *Frigeleford*, and is interpreted as Frige-leah-ford, the ford of the field of Friga or Frea, the Saxon goddess of spring; and the streamlet which is here crossed is Freya's Dyke. Thence the line of the track-way would continue northward over Frilford Heath with its ancient burial-ground. Here leaden coffins of the Romans still lie *in situ*, and in one of them a skeleton was found, with its coins to pay the ferryman for the passage of the Styx,—one of Constantine the Younger and one of Valens and

one of Gratiam,—showing that the Romans had used the cemetery up to the time when they left the Britons to take care of themselves. Overlying these were burial-urns and bodies of the Saxon conquerors, and the ground was filled with numberless relics of both races,—fibulas and umbos, beads and buckles, pins and spears, bricks, sherds, and pottery, besides large numbers of Roman coins and the usual accompaniment of oyster shells. It is not surprising that the rustics had a tradition of ghosts hovering about a thorn-bush which grew upon the field. A mile west of this is the site of a fine Roman villa, with its hypocaust and nine chambers, a corridor seventy feet in length on its western front, and a remarkable bath-chamber with its drain-pipe and cess-pit a few yards away.

Mr. Akerman, the explorer, describing the burial-ground and its relics in the *Archæologia*, suggested that the name of Frilford may point to the destruction of a bridge by the worshippers of Frea, when the conquered race, who might have acquiesced in submission to Christian invaders, preferred to die rather than yield to the fury of the heathen Saxons. Must we then infer that the Cuckoo Pen beside Gang-bridge was the "Frea's lea" where the Britons held out to the last?

CHAPTER XIII

SOME COTSWOLD FOLKLORE

THERE is at least one example of a spot to which the name of Cuckoo Pen has been attached at the end of Oxfordshire farthest removed from those which we have been investigating along the Chilterns and on the Thames. Here again it is possible that others may be known to those who are familiar with the neighbourhood. But this one is certainly of interest. It is in the parish of Idbury, on the eastern front of an offshoot of the Cotswold Hills. And it is worth noting that Sir John Evans, writing in the *Numismatic Chronicle*, would identify Idbury with "Gothabyrig," where was a mint and where coins were struck for Ethelred II., Cnut, and Harold I.; and also with "Juthan-byrig" or "Judan-byrig" where Wulfstan Archbishop of York was imprisoned by King Eadred for the two years previous to 954 when he was appointed to the bishopric of Dorchester in the same county. The transition is easy from *Judanbyrig* to the *Ideberie* of Domesday Book and the modern Idbury.

And here we are in another of those hill districts where the Briton was able to offer a prolonged resistance to the Saxon who had driven him from the

valleys. The name Cotswold itself contains a parable to illustrate the meeting of the Celt and the Saxon; for the former syllable is the Welsh *coed* and the other is the English *wold* or *weald*, each alike signifying a wood, although most of our wolds or wealds are now denuded of the woods from which they took their name. The Briton called it *coed*, the wood, which to the Englishman was a mere name with no meaning, and accordingly he called it the Coedswold, or Cotswold. And this district on its eastern slopes is very remarkable for its abundance of prehistoric remains, and is also peculiarly rich in the stories of primitive folklore.

The village of Idbury itself verges upon the end of Wychwood Forest, which covers the high ground between the Windrush and the Evenlode, two of the upper tributaries of the Thames. And Wychwood, —called "Huichwode" in the Domesday Survey and "Hwiccewuda" in an older document,—is commonly thought to take its name from the Hwiccas, the tribe which occupied the chief parts of what are now the shires of Gloucester and Worcester, and upon whose changing allegiance the fortunes of the kingdoms of Wessex and Mercia so largely turned. Very full of interest are the histories of this forest, which King John enclosed, and in which Edward IV. was hunting when he met with Elizabeth Woodville, the beautiful widow of Sir John Grey, and took her to be his Queen; where also several other of our Kings followed the chase, residing sometimes in the royal borough of Witney and sometimes at their old palace

of Langley in the parish of Shipton-under-Wychwood. Across the forest ran the line of the Akeman Street, on its way to Cirencester, where it met the Fosse Way passing through the Cotswolds in its southward course from Lincoln to Bath. From Burford close beside the Akeman Street to Stow-on-the-Wold upon the Fosse Way there is a highroad running northward along the forest and descending from the uplands near Idbury. And here near the roadside the earthworks of a large military camp are to be seen. On the east side of this camp an enclosed hill by the wayside is known as the Cuckoo Pen. But it has little that is distinctive about it except its name. It lies upon a rising ridge of ground where a streamlet springs and flows eastward to join the Evenlode, and the parish boundary between Idbury and Fifield follows along the bank of this stream. The villagers can give no reason for calling it the Cuckoo Pen except that they suppose it to have been at one time a pen for enclosing cattle, and they infer that the beasts so enclosed were nicknamed cuckoos. But they also hand down a legend of a great battle fought at the camp in Saxon times.

The camp is only one of many such remains that are to be found in the neighbourhood. In the adjoining parish of Shipton-under-Wychwood there are the two tall mounds known as High Barrow and Low Barrow at Leafield, and also an ancient camp at Lyneham. Just beyond this is the camp known as Knowle-Bury, near the hamlet of Chadlington which gives its name to the Hundred; and five miles

north of Idbury is the large circular barrow at Chastleton.

A few miles to the north-east, also, and close to the Warwickshire border, is the village of Hook-Norton, which appears to have got its name of Norton merely by assimilation to the neighbouring Chipping-Norton. Through the intermediate form of "Hokenarton" we identify it with the "Hocneratun" or "Hocceneratun" of the chroniclers, a royal vill, where in 917 a great number of persons were slain in an incursion of the Danes from Northampton and Leicester. The entrenchments of a camp which have almost disappeared beneath the plough are probably far older than the date of that slaughter. And half a mile beyond it is the fine circular British camp of Tadmarton, with the remains of a triple vallum, its innermost line being well preserved and encircled by a deep fosse. Two large tumuli are near it, and many Roman coins have been found. If Oxfordshire has its Gotham it is at Hook-Norton. In Gibson's edition of Camden's *Britannia* (1722) we read: "As to *Hokenorton*, the inhabitants were formerly such clowns and churls, that it pass'd into a proverb for a rude and ill-bred fellow, to be born at Hog's Norton." And Sir Walter Scott, in *Kenilworth*, tells of the learned pedagogue Erasmus Holiday: "He was born at Hogsnorton, where, according to popular saying, the pigs play upon the organ." The antiquity of such a tradition in this locality has been challenged, and some say that it only arose from confusing the word "Hook" or

"Hoke" with Hog; and some again have thought that it belonged properly to Hogh (or High) Norton in Leicestershire. But since Camden gives us the "proverb" of Hook-Norton it must at least deserve to be noticed among the illustrations of the prevalence of such stories on the borderlands where Briton and Saxon meet.

Between Chastleton and Hook-Norton are the famous Rollrich or Rollright Stones, which have given their name to the two adjoining parishes of Great and Little Rollright, standing on an eminence upon the verge of the county from which the eye may look far and wide both northward over Warwickshire and southward over Oxfordshire. Here are the remains of a circle more than a hundred feet in width, in which a grove of fir-trees has been planted. Once it had more than sixty stones, but hardly more than half are visible now, some few of them standing four feet out of the soil; and eighty yards to the north-east rises a great solitary stone, five feet broad and nearly nine in height; and again to the east is a group of five taller stones together, the highest of them standing nearly eleven feet, being evidently the remains of a cromlech from which the flat top-stone has been lost. The solitary block is the King Stone, and the five that are near him are his knights,—the "whispering knights," as the weird sound of the wind breathes between them. For the five who were in attendance on the King were whispering a conspiracy against him He would have been Sovereign of England,

could he have moved six yards forward and come in view of Long Compton; but his knights, it would seem, stopped him here, where everything else could be seen but the object of his ambition was hidden; and he was turned to stone because his aim in life was lost, and the five traitors paid the penalty of their treachery and were turned to stone with him, and nothing remained for the circle of his sixty soldiers but to become stones also. The old antiquary, Dr. Stukeley, read the name of Rollright as Rhol-Drwgg, the Druids' Wheel; and whatever modern critics may think of his etymology, it is an interpretation which reminds us of the old days in which unquestionably these stones were reared. Long Compton is hidden from the King Stone by a jutting brow of the broken hillside, lying in such a hollow as its name implies; and we are reminded here again that this hollow was still known as a "combe" in the old tongue of the Briton when the new tongue of the Saxon called the settlement a "ton." The legend fits in with the facts: for it implies that when the conquering invader took possession of the neighbourhood he failed to become King of all England because there was this spot upon the hillside which was able for a time to elude his grasp.

This Long Compton has also another legend pointing to the same conclusion that the Briton still occupied the combe when the Saxon came here. It is not handed down in the traditions of the people, but preserved in the Chronicle of the Yorkshire

Abbey of Jervaulx,—a compilation, as is supposed, of the time of King Edward III., though commonly attributed to John Bromton who became abbot of that house half a century later. According to this story, St. Augustine himself travelled into Oxfordshire and came to preach "in the town called Compton," where the priest of the town complained to him that the lord of the manor refused to pay tithe of his possessions, and though he had often admonished him and had even threatened him with excommunication he still found him obstinate. When Augustine had called for him and reasoned with him in vain he turned to the altar to begin the Mass, bidding all the excommunicate to depart, whereupon a corpse arose from the churchyard. Augustine asked him who he was, and he replied that he was patron of the church before the English came and had died excommunicate for refusing to pay his tithe; and the Saint enjoined him to point out the grave of the priest who had repelled him from communion; so he in his turn arose from his grave and bore out the truth of the story. Then at Augustine's bidding his ghost absolved the other ghost and both returned to their graves in peace, while the obstinate knight became a humble follower of the Saint's teaching. At least we may gather from the tale that the memory of the Britons and their church at Long Compton had a place in the minds of the Saxon conquerors.

The Warwickshire parish of Long Compton is only one of a series of Comptons that lie in the

hollows of these hills. Adjoining it on the west is the Gloucestershire parish of Little Compton. Its archiepiscopal tradition rests on more solid historic ground than that of its neighbour; for the handsome Elizabethan manor house was the refuge of Archbishop Juxon in the days of King Charles II. But for the moment we are more concerned with a primeval relic which the parish boasts, known as the Four-Shire Stone. Some have said that this is the Sceor-ston or Shire-stane where Edmund Ironside defeated Canute and his Danes; but Sherstone in Wiltshire has a stronger claim. Be that as it may, since this stone marks the meeting-point of the shires of Oxford, Gloucester, Worcester, and Warwick, it can probably tell a tale of a much earlier age.

Compton Wynyates lies a few miles beyond, in another deep hollow among the hills. It is said to have been planted with a vineyard, whence came the special designation of the village; but locally it is Compton-in-the-Hole. And this Compton gave its name to the ancient family which first became famous when Sir William Compton was the favourite of Henry VIII. He built the house, half fortress and half mansion, which still retains its handsome chapel and its lofty hall with minstrel gallery and screen, its ghost-room and its secret chamber; and outside are its wondrous chimneys with their wealth of fantastic ornament. Here he entertained his royal master; and hither his grandson, another William Compton, brought his bride when in the disguise of a baker boy he had carried

her off in a basket from the home of her father, the wealthy alderman Sir John Spencer of Islington; and Queen Elizabeth cleverly devised to make the old man pardon them. Here their son Spencer Compton, the Earl of Northampton, entertained King Charles the night before the battle of Edgehill; and when the earl had been killed at Hopton Heath and the royal fortunes had fallen, the parliamentarian army garrisoned Compton Wynyates.

Yet another Compton lies beyond this, distinguished by the name of its ancient possessors as Compton Verney, and adding one more to this line of wooded dells in which the Briton left the name of "combe" and the Saxon made his "ton." And then, coming back to our starting-point at Idbury, we have just above it Gawcombe in Gloucestershire on the one side; and Iccombe in Worcestershire, with the remains of an ancient encampment, is on the other side.

All along this district among the "combes" of the Briton we meet with the "bury" or "beorgh" of the Saxon. A few miles to the east of Idbury we have, near together, Spelsbury and Cornbury, and also Charlbury, the *Ceorlingcburh* near the Windrush where is said to be the burial-place of Diuma, the missionary sent here from Lindisfarne in the seventh century. Close at hand upon the west, on the line of the Fosse Way, we have Maugersbury, and three miles north of it is the "long beorgh" which gives its name to the parish of Longborough. Then, on the south, beyond the

farther end of Wychwood, is Burford, the historic "beorgh" on the "ford" of the Windrush, where Cuthred the West-Saxon King in 752 drove back the Mercian Ethelbald on a field which to this day bears the name of Battlebridge.

And when we have the name of Cuckoo Pen applied to a spot in this district, it is the more interesting to find that in another spot only some twelve miles to the north of this the Cuckoo myth itself is localised. Ebrington Hill stands conspicuously in the Cotswold range within the border of Gloucestershire and looking down eastward over Warwickshire. One of the sources of the Stour rises on the south of it, and in the hollows beneath its sides we find Hilcote Combe on the north and Compton Scorpion on the east. The name of the market-town of Chipping Campden appears to imply a camp or battle-ground in the dene or valley lying between this hill and the lofty ridge to the west of it, and there is evidence of the place having been important in the days when the chieftains of the Saxon tribes were pushing the Briton farther and farther west, and dislodging him from his last strongholds in the Midlands. The village of Ebrington lies under the south-western slopes of the hill to which it gives its name. Locally they commonly call it Ebberton, and its true name appears to be Edburghton, since its church is dedicated to St. Edburgh. The people of the village are credited with having perpetrated several foolish actions in days gone by, and indeed Ebrington is the Gotham of the Cotswolds. They

put the clock forward to make Christmas come sooner; when they fancied that their candles were damp they put them into the oven to dry them; and among various other strange deeds of the same kind they brought hurdles to hedge in the cuckoo.

CHAPTER XIV

GOTHAM TALES IN NORFOLK

Among the counties of England that are rich in old folklore Norfolk holds a high place. To that county belongs, for example, the story of the "Babes in the Wood": "The old ballad of the Children in the Wood which is one of the darling songs of the common people," as Addison describes it in the *Spectator;* for the scene of this story is in the parish of Merton near Watton, where the old Elizabethan hall is the home of the wicked uncle, and the neighbouring Wayland Wood with its ancient oaks and thick undergrowth of hazel is the burial-place of the two little victims over whom the robin spread the fallen leaves.

A familiar story also is that of the Swaffham pedlar, who was thrice bidden by a nocturnal apparition to go to London Bridge where he should find a treasure; and going at last reluctantly, with his dog for a companion, he spent a whole day walking to and fro between Middlesex and Surrey with no result, till a kindly inquirer from one of the houses on the bridge heard his purpose; whereupon he made the strange reply that he himself had once been bidden in a dream to go to a town called Swaff-

ham, in Norfolk, and there in a pedlar's garden close beside the church he would find a pot of gold; but he had never been and never meant to go: so the Norfolk man returning with a good heart found it all in his own garden as the Londoner had said, and with this newly-gained wealth he rebuilt Swaffham Church on the grand scale in which it remains at the present day; and he caused figures of a pedlar with his pack and with his muzzled dog to be set for finials on the seat-ends and to be sculptured on the basement-moulding of the lofty tower.

Another Norfolk legend is that of Sir Barney Brograve, who was mowing the corn in his fields near Worstead Town and boasted to his men that he would stake his own soul in a mowing match with the devil; and when he could not escape his bargain, and an acre of black-stalked beans had been staked out for each of them, Sir Barney stuck the devil's acre over with iron rods among the bean-stalks and thus came out an easy winner.

Then there are the curious "shrieking pits" on Roughton Heath some four miles south of Cromer,—pits which one local tradition connects with the days of Cromwell and another carries farther back to the days of Litester the Norfolk dyer who headed the rising of the tradesmen and the peasants against the nobles in 1381 and was beheaded when the revolt was crushed by Bishop Henry le Despencer at North Walsham in this neighbourhood. But their remote antiquity is evident, whether they are the fire-holes of British huts, as some think, or the

flint workings of some prehistoric race, as others think; and when the sacrilegious hands of modern investigators opened and examined the neighbouring earth-mounds, it is said that the Banshee uttered her mysterious wailing among them, distressed by the disturbance of the dead. In the same district too, near Runton, the tale is told of Shock, the headless black dog from the under world, prowling along the sea-cliffs to keep their dismal solitude unbroken,—the counterpart of the Bargeist or bear-like dog who frequents the hills of Cornwall, as we learn from the local legends, and of the *Mauthe Doog* that haunted the guard-room of Peel Castle in the Isle of Man until one day a drunken soldier daring to face him alone was struck dumb and with gaping mouth and hair on end died in agonies and "the spectre-hound of Man" appeared no more, as we read in *Peveril of the Peak* and in the *Lay of the Last Minstrel.*

In the earliest of all the collections of such tales as those of Gotham the people of Norfolk are made the butt. The *Descriptio Norfolciensium* has come down to us in three or four ancient copies, some of which are of later date than others and have been amplified with additional stories. It was printed in a volume of *Early Mysteries and other Latin Poems of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*, by Mr. Thomas Wright in 1838. He assigns its composition to the latter part of the twelfth century, but points out also that at least one of the stories is evidently of a much earlier age. One of the old manuscripts of this

strange collection contains also a reply to it, written about half a century later by a writer who claims to be a Norfolk man and gives his name as John of St. Omer; and from him we learn that the Description of the Norfolcians was the work of a monk of Peterborough. It consists of two hundred and fifty-six lines of rhyming Latin verse, in which about a dozen ridiculous stories are told. Both the versification and the latinity show the work of a good scholar. The following is a free rendering of the introductory verses, preserving the style of its rhymes and the general form of its metre.

Once a decree went from Cæsar the emperor
Bidding his messengers travel the countries o'er,
Write him the record of each one, and furthermore
Ask which are better and which are inferior.

Forth they departed the world to investigate;
All through the provinces searching they penetrate:
Speedily homeward again they perambulate,
Then before Cæsar their tale they enunciate.

Spake out the foremost, and thus was his tale begun:
Hear me, my lord, many seas have I overrun,
Through the broad lands of the world is my journey done;
But of all provinces, out of comparison,
None is so hateful, in truth, as the Norfolk one.

Barren the land is and worthless its people is,
Full of all envies and lies and hypocrisies,
And to all nations their ways are the contraries;
Whereof their manners and doings are witnesses.

Bad is the land, as your eyes very plainly see;
Choicest of wheat you may sow in it carefully,
Tares or some darnel at best will the harvest be;
These in that country have always the mastery.

Surely the evil one when to the earth he fell
Dropped into Norfolk and made the land horrible,
Emptied it wholly of all things desirable;
Thenceforth good grain from that soil is impossible.

"They gnaw and chew their darnel-bread (it continues), and take a wheat-ear for an evil spirit; for if they ever discover one in their cornfields, they denounce it as the devil himself and gather round it with their cudgels, crying and shouting, Fly away, devil, fly away quickly; never shalt thou stay in our crops."

Next we are told that if a little boy goes with his father to market and sees a cake and asks what it is, his father tells him to hold his tongue, for he does not want it; such food is only for the sick; it does no good to the whole.

There may be four towns in the county, it proceeds, containing some half-dozen men of position who occasionally invite guests, and they have a clever device so that they may never lack wheaten bread. They order some at the public expense and put it in safe-keeping; then when one of them wants some for his guests he sends for it; but no one dares to break the bread, and thus it is all kept intact until it begins to get mouldy, whereupon all are bound to eat it together; and, the writer adds, "this bread they call in English *rodswein*," or, as another of the copies reads it, *gumruncy;* of which puzzling words the latter portions are clear enough,—in the one case "swine," and in the other case "runcy," which is Old English for a horse; whence we must gather that they mean some form of "pig-bread" and "horse-bread."

The next story, though it is only found in a later manuscript, evidently belongs to an early period

when the lower classes of the people were in a state of serfdom. There was in Norfolk a certain mighty man who grievously oppressed his country-folk, often seized their money and cattle, and trampled upon them by his evil deeds; whereupon these country-folk in their distress took counsel together and agreed to offer the knight a sum of money that they might have free tenure for the future: the knight was pleased with their gift, and at once ordered a charter of freedom to be prepared, with a handsome seal of green wax attached to it: but the new-made freemen went to the tavern, filled their empty stomachs with wine-dregs, and drank and drank again till night came on, and when they wanted a candle none could be found; but one of them, who was more active than the rest, spoke up and said, "Hanging on our charter is some beautiful wax, of which we can make a nice candle; the wax is no good to us, only the scroll; if you take the wax away, still the writing is plain": and all with one voice reply, "A great providence has sent it; good is the counsel that he gives": so they make the seal into a splendid light: the knight hears of it with glee, and bids them go back to their former condition; but the rustics refuse, saying, "We are free tenants; no service can you compel from us; we have our charter to prove it." So their lord ordered the charter to be brought: "What is the use?" they asked; "you know very well that you ordered our charter to be made that we should be free from all service": but at last they had to show the charter; and the country-

man who had the chief voice among them stood up and held it closed in his hand: "This charter," he said, "you must acknowledge, for with your own lips you ordered the writing of it": which the lord began to deny, and said, "Give it to the clerk; let it be read at once"; but the countryman would not let down its tail; and when one of the servants standing by him began to take it from his hand, there was no seal to confirm it; wherefore the learned judges at once gave their judgment that these countrymen must be ever as they were before: and because they had thus taken themselves off from their lord they were shut up in prison till they had rendered to him all the money and cattle that they possessed.

If, it continues, you ask one of these Norfolk countrymen the way to any town, he laughs and tells you, "Walk by the cross-way, then leave it behind you, and follow as the crow flies." And then we have the familiar story of their going to market and carrying their sack of darnel on their shoulders so as not to hurt their horses; "for the fools themselves are on a level with the beasts."

Next we are told that "after market they go straight to the tavern and drink again and again what we call *buslusse*." Later copies explain it as beer, and John of St. Omer in his reply to the lampoon calls it *busket*, and says it means wine-dregs and water without any grain or spirit. "And when they are so drunk that they don't know what they say and topple over as they try to mount their

horses, My fauvel, they exclaim" [the word has two meanings, a *bay horse* and *flattery*]: "let me advise you to wait till I am on your back, or else straight to perdition you go and never get home again."

"If anyone knocks at the door when they are sitting at dinner, they answer, We are not at home: get you gone: come again to-morrow."

"One summer a Norfolk man carefully collected his honey and put it in a jar; then he left it and went to other things; and his dog, who was nearly starved to death, spied where it was and ran in and ate it all; whereupon the man in great distress addressed his dog, Hast thou not every day two herrings' heads to eat, at the very least? By the blazing sun thou shalt give back that honey! Go and fare worse for the future! And he squeezed the dog between two sticks till the honey came up: then he collected it again in his earthen jar and had it taken to the next market, and when a buyer said that it smelt sour he straitly swore, It is excellent honey, but no doubt it has been a little while in a dirty vessel."

Then we are told of a man of Norfolk who found a large beetle and called it his pretty bird: What should he do with it? If it should bite him he would never throw it away: and he kept on repeating gleefully again and again, "Ha! thu mi swete brid!" finally resolving that he would eat it.

Another countryman was ploughing in the field

and lighted upon a large toad which he put into his pocket till his work was done and then carried home with him: "How, godsip, what is this?" asked a neighbour who met him. "A partridge," he replied. "Why is its foot so broad?" "Because it goes on foot more than on horseback?" "Why is its belly so wide?" "Because it is a bird and very fat." "Then why has it no feathers?" "Because it is a young chicken." "Is it fit to be eaten?" "What do you mean, you donkey? It is food for a King."

The story of the dog and the honey appears again in a little volume of "Coffee-House Jests" printed in 1688, butter taking the place of honey: and it is attributed there to "a cleanly woman in Cambridgeshire" who "made it up for Cambridge market; but her maid told her she was ashamed to see such a nasty trick done. Hold your peace, you fool! says she; 'tis good enough for schollards; away to market with it!"

The only story of this Norfolk series which appears in the Gotham Tales is that of the rider who carried the sack to save the back of the horse that he was riding; and this, as the editor points out, "is but another version of the Irish exciseman who, when carried over a bog on his companion's shoulders, hoisted his cask of brandy on his own shoulders that his porter's burden might be lessened." Indeed there is no reason to suppose that any of these tales related originally to the people of Norfolk. It is much more likely that the monk of

Peterborough owed that county some grudge and exercised his wit and his versifying powers in putting together such stories as he could collect from any sources, just as the Carthusian three or four centuries later compiled the Gotham Tales.

CHAPTER XV

A NORFOLK OWL PEN

NOTHING that corresponds to the Cuckoo story is told in the *Descriptio Norfolciensium.* But there is one place in Norfolk where that story is actually current at the present day, though the bird is an owl instead of a cuckoo. In the high ground of the north-eastern portion of the county is the little town of Holt, or, as it was called in former times, Holt Market, that is, the Market in the Wood. Its ancient importance is indicated by the fact that the Hundred of Holt takes its name from it. It was a royal demesne in the Confessor's time, and it was owned after the Conquest by the family of De Vaux. Here is a large level plateau of gravel and sand, a mile or two in width, which has been styled the Garden of Norfolk, and where the cultivated fields alternate with tracts of the primeval wood from which the town took its name; and parts are recent fir-plantations, and parts are gorse-covered common. "The Lows," at the eastern end, are an undulating heath where Nature still holds her own and offers rare plants and flowers to those who will be at the pains to search for them. The plateau is marked off by a depression in the ground completely surrounding it,

and this deepens into a considerable valley on the west. On this side the town of Holt stands, with the railway climbing up to it from Melton Constable and dropping down from it again towards Sheringham and Cromer. It is evident, then, that we have here a geographical position which must always have been important in ancient times; and here, also, we are in an exposed angle of our island, liable to constant attack from the pirates of the northern seas. The Count of the Saxon Shore must have needed a watchful eye as he passed along the coast-road of this district from Caistor to Brancaster.

It has been seriously argued, and not without good grounds, that Weybourne, the nearest sea-point to Holt, is the spot which Julius Cæsar chose for his landing-place when he came to Britain; that Gessoriacum, from which he set sail, is not Boulogne, as is commonly supposed, but one of the ports at the mouths of the Rhine; and that the usual theory of his having crossed from Boulogne to the Kentish coast is due to a misreading of the sense of his commentaries. If anyone would study the arguments fully, let him read an interesting pamphlet, printed in 1868, in which they are well worked out by Mr. Scott Surtees; and if anyone would appreciate the difficulties which beset the ordinary account, let him look into any annotated edition of Cæsar *De Bello Gallico*. 'For the campaign in which Cæsar was engaged was on the Rhine; and he tells us that he crossed from the territory of the Morini, which we know to have been on the coast near that river.

An old map also shows names closely resembling Gessoriacum,—Goes and Goessen, Geersdyke and Goesse Diep,—in the district near the Rhine mouth. Moreover, Dion Cassius, the careful and discriminating historian of the second century, tells us that Cæsar "crossed the Rhine and afterwards passed over into Britain," implying that he started from a point north of that river. He had a fair wind and a quick passage, but it took his fastest ships ten hours to cross. He arrived at a coast of such a nature that the troops of hostile Britons on the cliffs could hurl their javelins down upon the beach below,—exactly such cliffs as we have at Cromer. He anchored there until a favourable wind and tide enabled him to proceed seven miles to a place where the beach was flat and open, and where the Britons could drive their chariots down the hillsides to the shore, while the shore itself was so steep that the Romans could row their galleys close to land and hurl darts at the Britons and when they attempted to land they had to leap into deep water; where also, when they landed, they found themselves among marshes, yet with a plot of dry land which gave Cæsar a standing-ground: and all this agrees exactly with the character of the coast at Weybourne, where we find the deeply shelving shingle beach, and the channel running up into the marshes, and a knoll called Green-barrow Hill in the midst of them, out of which Roman remains are dug; and the high ground of Weybourne Hope rises steeply over them,—a point where at high tide,

it is said, a man-of-war could ride in so close to the beach that her yard-arm would project over the edge of the cliff; and a battery was posted there in the days of Trafalgar; for there is a saying in the neighbourhood that

> "He who England's realm would win,
> Must at Weybourne Hope begin."

We know, too, from the Paston Letters that "Crowmer and Blakeney," the towns on either side of Weybourne, were "much spoken of among Frenchmen" when they were meditating an invasion of England during the disorders of Henry the Sixth's reign.

When Cæsar had landed, three weeks sufficed to show him the courage of the natives and to make him feel the difficulties which the conquest of the island would involve. He prudently concluded a treaty and made his way back to Gaul for the winter, returning in the spring with an increased armament to the same coast as in the preceding year. Starting at sunset with a south-west wind, which dropped at midnight, he found in the morning that he had "left Britain behind him on the left-hand,"—for so it would seem to him if he had passed the coast of Norfolk and had before him the flats of Lincolnshire, which would be invisible to him. He tells us that his shipmen rowed the vessels to the shore which was already known to them; the Britons fled at the sight of their great fleet; and they landed, as Dion Cassius adds, "all along the coast." It was a soft and open shore, says Cæsar,

where the ships where anchored; twelve miles inland there was a camp of the enemy; and when Cæsar approached it they advanced from the high-ground to a river to meet him in battle: and here are the camps to this day, "all along the coast," at Holme and Brancaster and Holkham, and, it may be added, at Weybourne and Runton and elsewhere; and the coast west of Weybourne is "soft and open," with its mud-tracts and sand-dunes; and some twelve miles from the marshes near Weybourne, and four miles south of Cromer, there is a British camp at Hanworth, upon one of the tributaries of the River Bure. Finally, the writer concludes, all the minute particulars described by the historians are fulfilled on this one spot of the coast of Britain: but "show me (he adds) any other part of Britain where one half of these undesigned coincidences come together."

Then he points out also that the British traditions lead us to the same conclusions as the Latin historians; for the Brut tells us that Cæsar went into Flanders and built his fleet; "into Flanders he ferde and makede his schip-færde"; and then he determined to sail into Britain; and when he returned it was "into Flandre," and while he was there "word com to France" telling how he had fared; whence it is evident that according to this authority the point of Cæsar's starting and returning were not upon the French shore. And further, it is at least a coincidence worth observing that the Welsh Triads relate how "Avarwy son of Lludd gave space for

landing to the men of Rome, in the narrow green point, and not more; and the consequence of this was the gaining of the Isle of Britain by the men of Rome"; and a narrow green point still called by the name of Green-barrow Hill is to be seen to this day at Weybourne.

It would be hard to find any district of England that possesses more abundant or more interesting relics both of a prehistoric occupation and of the Roman invasion than this north-eastern portion of Norfolk; and the writer who has been quoted assures us that "in all Britain there are not such a large number of British dwellings remaining as there are on the hills from Felbrigg to Weybourne." The "shrieking pits" of Roughton Heath have been mentioned already. Not far from these, and some two miles west of Cromer, on the brow of the hill overlooking Runton, is a fine entrenchment, apparently British in its origin but occupied and adapted by the Romans and known traditionally as "the Roman Camp." Curious hollowed and embanked tracks lead up to it through the woods both on the east and on the west, and the ascent from Beeston shows in one place the remains of a pebble pavement. Near the camp are hollows in the ground known as the "leech-pits,"—that is, presumably, the lych-pits, or pits of the dead. Beeston Church stands solitarily in a commanding position amidst the fields overlooking the cliffs; and its raised and embanked graveyard, with embanked fences leading to it in the same line at either end, has all the

appearance of an oblong Roman camp, like that upon the neighbouring hill-top. Earthworks which may be the remains of yet another Roman camp are visible near the end of the hills where the cliff drops west of Sheringham ; but all hereabouts has been dug and altered to adapt the ground for the golf-links which now make it famous. A little farther west, on the brow of the high ground of Kelling Heath, overlooking the village of Weybourne, a small Roman camp has its vallum and ditch perfect, with narrow openings on the north and south. Not many yards from it a primitive pit is well preserved, and several others are to be found on the same common, whether pit-dwellings or flint-workings or fire-holes, or what not ? A group of such pits is noted at the end of the heath near Kelling village; and on the same ground, nearer to Holt, is a group of tumuli. Nor must the Roman station at Baconsthorpe, some four miles south of Weybourne, be forgotten ; where a quarter of a century ago was found a huge earthen pot buried deep in the soil and containing from ten to fourteen thousand silver coins, mostly of the reign of Postumus, hidden here, we must suppose, by legionaries who never came back to unearth them again.

Holt itself is an old-world town, and the houses for some distance along one side of the principal street seem to testify to the former importance of its market; for they are dotted about irregularly with narrow alleys between them, each one set in its position without any reference either to the next

THE SPOUTS COMMON, HOLT, NORFOLK.

house or to the roadway, thus suggesting that they are the successors of bygone market-stalls where each squatter in due course took a plot of ground for his own. The town is at present chiefly remarkable for its Grammar School, under the auspices of the Fishmongers' Company of London, and known as Gresham School; for it was founded in the middle of the sixteenth century by Sir John Gresham, a native of Holt who became a merchant-prince of London and an alderman of the City,—brother to Sir Thomas Gresham, who founded the Royal Exchange. Their grasshopper crest, seen in the arms of the school and conspicuous also as a weather-vane over the Royal Exchange, belongs to a tradition that Sir Thomas in his infancy was cast away by his mother and left in a field to die, but was discovered by a kindly neighbour through the chirping of a grasshopper. The school was the manor-house of Holt-Perers, and from it sprung Alice Perers, who figures in history more prominently than honourably first as maid of honour and afterwards as rival to Philippa the Queen of Edward III. But we are concerned now with the legends and stories of an older age.

The high ground upon which Holt is built has already been described. It remains to note, further, that upon the steep western face of this high ground, adjacent to the main road which leads up into the town, there is a piece of undulating common-land, its grass varied with tangled underwood, known locally as Spout Common, or briefly "The Spouts."

In a hollow in front of it an abundant spring of the purest water flows out of the gravel. This spring is now covered by a brick vault, from which it pours through a spout to fill a pond for the public use of the town; and thence it flows westward in a brooklet which feeds the little river Glaven a mile below. Formerly, before the erection of the brick vault, the spring-head was protected only by an enclosing wall. The neighbours dignify the townsfolk with the title of "the Holt Knowing Ones," and illustrate it by a story of one who caught an owl and having no place to secure it for the night thrust it into this enclosure through the spout, but was astonished in the morning to find that it had flown over the wall to regain its freedom. Thus the tale of the "Knowing One" of Holt and his owl is exactly parallel to that of the wise men of Gotham and their cuckoo. And the prominent position which the town occupies, with the spring issuing from under the brow of the hill, is precisely one which of all others in that district the Briton could hold most energetically and most securely against the invading Angle.

CHAPTER XVI

CUCKOO LORE

When we bear in mind the strange habits which mark off the cuckoo from the other birds that are familiar to us, and which seem to invest its life with a certain air of mystery, it is not surprising that an abundance of folklore should have gathered freely round it. The Gotham story of penning the cuckoo is but one among numerous fables that are told of the bird. Its re-appearance at the same period each year and the strangeness of its note when it is heard once more could never fail to impress the imagination. Spenser calls it "The merry cuckoo, messenger of spring." And Scott, in *The Betrothed*, makes his Welsh bard exclaim: "Hath not the cuckoo a harsh note, and yet she tells us of green buds and springing flowers?" The note is so curious and remarkable that most languages have tried, like our own, to imitate it as an appellation of the bird. Cuckoo, coucou, cuco, cwccw, cuculo, cuclillo, cokkok, guck-guck, gowk,—so the various modern tongues call it, and so we get back to the Latin cuculus and the Greek coccyx and the Sanskrit kokila. And being constantly repeated, without variety, the note is in itself sufficiently striking to become proverbial. Mr. Hardy, in

his *Popular History of the Cuckoo*, gives us the Scotch proverb, "You're like the gowk, you have not a rane but ane"; and also the German, "Du singest immer einen Gesang, wie der Guckguck." This constant repetition of the cry serves to point a sneer in one of the Comedies of Aristophanes, where a man is said to have been elected leader by three cuckoos, meaning that his electors were three noisy fellows who went on shouting for him till they seemed to be a multitude.

In very mild seasons the cuckoo is heard in February, but he seldom arrives before the beginning of April and he gets even to the Shetlands before May is out. He remains till the end of the summer, and the old ones leave in August. But since all parental duty is ended as soon as the egg is laid, the young are left behind. They are not strong enough for the long flight, it seems, until September. Only in rare instances are they heard in October. Mr. Swainson, in his *Folklore and Provincial Names of British Birds*, gives the rhymes which are popular in the eastern counties. Among them the Norfolk lines are best known:

"In April—the cuckoo shows his bill;
In May—he sings both night and day;
In June—he altereth his tune;
In July—he prepares to fly;
In August—go he must."

And to these the Suffolk people add:

"In September—you'll ollers remember;
In October—you'll never get over."

And there is the following addition for Northumberland, looking for the bird a month earlier:

> "The cuckoo comes of mid-March,
> And cucks of mid-Aperill,
> And gauns away of midsummer-month
> When the corn begins to fill:"

where, however, another version of the rhyme gives it a month longer,—"of Lammas-tide."

The cuckoo thus identifies himself with the spring and summer. "As the herald of warmth," the same writer continues, "he seems to be intimately connected with St. Gertrude, the successor of Freya or Iduna, the goddesses of love, of spring, of beauty, whose tears were pearls and flowers." For St. Gertrude, like Freya, was the banisher of ice and snow and the bringer of rain and sunshine.

Among the Neapolitan peasantry if a vine-dresser has not pruned his vine before the vernal equinox his neighbours will call him "cuckoo," both as a reminder that the bird has arrived and as a reproach for his laziness. The joke is as old as the days of Horace, for in one of his Satires the fury with which the vine-dresser replies serves as the strongest example of abusive rage. And centuries further back in classical antiquity, in the *Works and Days* of Hesiod, there is a warning to the ploughman who is behindhand in beginning his task, saying that you must hurry the work on if it happen that you are only starting it

> "When first the cuckoo from the oak you hear
> In welcome sounds foretell the springtime near."

The advent of the bird was accordingly welcomed with festivity in some districts. In Shropshire, for instance, as a note in Brand's *Popular Antiquities* tells us, it was the custom in the early part of the nineteenth century that "as soon as the first cuckoo has been heard all the labouring classes leave work, if in the middle of the day, and the time is devoted to mirth and jollity over what is called Cuckoo Ale."

It was natural, too, that anything which seemed specially to belong to this season of the year should belong also to the cuckoo. Any bright blossom that appeared early among the wild flowers would be called the Cuckoo-flower, according to the fancy of different districts. In the eastern counties it is a little purple orchis. Elsewhere it is the Lady's Smock with its pale lilac cross-shaped blossoms,—"the lady's smock all silver white," as Shakespeare calls it. But his cuckoo-flower, the *Lychnis flos cuculi* of botanists, is the Ragged Robin, with its jagged pink petals. Shakespeare puts it in low company, classing together "nettles, cuckoo-flowers, darnel, and all the idle weeds." He sings also of

> "Daisies pied and violets blue
> And cuckoo-buds of yellow hue,"

which are doubtless the Mary-buds, or Marsh Marigolds. The little white bells of the wood-sorrel are known as "cuckoo-meat," and formerly were "pain de coucou." Similarly, the little mass of frothy substance with which the green frog-aphis encases itself upon a plant is "cuckoo-spittle."

And the wild arum, with its coiled leaf of glossy green enclosing the tall spike of deep plum colour or of pale yellow distinguished as "lords and ladies," is also known as "cuckoo-pint." In Turner's *Herbal* (1551) we read of "coccow-pynt called also in English ramp or aron." This is very curious. It can hardly mean "cuckoo-cup." Can it possibly be "cuckoo-pent," a floral embodiment of the myth of the pent cuckoo?

As the harbinger of spring and summer the bird would naturally be expected to foretell the character of the coming harvest. "As the advent of the cuckoo finds the season backward or forward," says a writer in *Bygone Norfolk*, "so will the prospects of keep for stock, and probable rises and falls in prices of corn, vary." Hence the lines:

> "If the cuckoo lights on the bare thorn,
> Sell your sheep and keep your corn;
> But when he lights on the blooming hip,
> Sell your corn and keep your sheep."

Nor did its prophetic powers end here; for the cuckoo inherited the attributes of the goddess of love whom Christianity had dethroned; and a young girl, hearing the cuckoo for the first time in spring, would count the number of its notes, for this would tell her the number of years that were to come before she would be married. Indeed, the bird of summer had been also the bird of marriage far back in the old Greek mythology; for Jupiter put on the form of a cuckoo when he wooed Juno on Mount Thorax in Argolis, and the hill took the name of Mons Coccy-

gius, or Cuckoo-mount. Hera, or Juno, the queen of the gods and wife of Jupiter, is the personification of the warm bright sky; and thus the cuckoo was her sacred bird and sat upon her sceptre.

The disappearance of the bird for half the year seemed necessarily to have some mystery about it. A belief is said to prevail still in Cornwall that the cuckoo remains hidden through the winter in caves and hollow trees. In old times it was popularly supposed to assume for the winter the form of some other bird, usually of a hawk; and this notion has been handed down from very early times. "Aristotle, and after him Pliny," says Mr. Hardy, "mentions that it was the belief of some that during a portion of the year it was converted by the alteration of its voice, shape, and plumage, into a real bird of prey." But the fancy is a natural one; for though the head and claws are entirely different yet the general resemblance of the two birds is so close that a cuckoo at a distance or on the wing is frequently mistaken for a hawk. Then, seeing that the cuckoo is the annual herald of the spring and also that it disappears each year, it was easy to infer that the same bird always reappears each spring and sings its song in the same grove of trees year after year. It is but a little step forward to the further inference that the cuckoo never dies. The same collection of birds' folklore quotes a medieval eclogue ascribing to the cuckoo the years of the sun, and quotes also from the *Zoological Mythology* of Gubernatis the Italian proverb, "the years of the cuckoo," and the

Piedmontese, "as old as the cuckoo," to imply extreme old age.

The bird has gained an evil reputation for its habit of laying its egg in the nest of another bird; though in fact recent naturalists assure us that it lays the egg upon the ground and then seeks a nest to place it in. It must choose the nest of a little bird, since a larger one would resent it. But it is equally well satisfied with the nest of the reed-warbler in marshy lowlands or with that of the tit-lark or meadow-pipit on a breezy upland. Sometimes it is that of a chaffinch or of a sparrow. They say that the comparative smallness of the cuckoo's egg is to be explained on this among other grounds; for the mother must carry it in her mouth to the nest, and it must be deposited in the small nest of a little bird that cannot resist her, and the necessities of the case demand that incubation shall be accomplished speedily; so that in one way or another the larger eggs would inevitably perish. And they say, too, that the reason why she cannot have a nest of her own, like other birds, is because of the fierceness of her young; for the little ruffian speedily ejects all companions, whether eggs or young, from his nest. Before he is two days' old, and before he can see,—so a recent writer on "The Cuckoo" in the *Times* newspaper relates,—he wedges himself under the nestling that has to be got rid of, hoists it upon his back to the edge of the nest, feeling about him with his stumps of wings which compensate for lack of vision, and eventually, perhaps not until after

repeated attempts, he topples it over: "thus in less than forty-eight hours from birth the rival princes are all well out of the way, and the child of the vagabonds is installed as undisputed heir." Even when he has had a brother-cuckoo beside him, both have fought till one or the other is thrown out upon the ground. It was therefore a purely mythical supposition of the ancients that the parent bird devoured all the other eggs to keep the nest for her own. Yet the foster-mother toils for the imp as if he were her own offspring: and hard toil it is for the pipit or whatever little bird it be; for another of the marvels that belong to the newly-fledged cuckoo is the voracious appetite by which it feeds up its strength so rapidly that a month later it can take its flight to Africa. But no observer has been able to discover, even now, what number of eggs a cuckoo-hen will lay in one season; and though two eggs are sometimes found together none can tell whether they are the eggs of one bird or of two; nor can it be discovered how the young birds find their way over sea and land in their autumn migration without the guidance of the old ones who have gone a month before them: so completely does the cuckoo succeed in keeping her strange ways outside the limits of man's knowledge.

From the bird's habit of laying her eggs in another bird's nest we get (says Hardy) a German proverb: "Thou rewardest me as the cuckoo did the hedge-sparrow." And from the same habit comes the old-world term "cuckold" (for it seems to be only an

altered form of cuckoo) so frequently occurring in Shakespeare and old writers generally, applied to a husband whose wife is unfaithful to him, but applicable properly and originally to the guilty paramour; and this, it is said, "pervades every language of Europe and also occurs in the East among the Arabians."

The origin of the fable of the cuckoo-penners must no doubt be sought in connection with the bird's yearly appearance as the herald of spring. The men of Gotham, as the tale says, "would have pinned in the cuckoo whereby she should sing all the year." They wished, in fact, to preserve a perpetual summer; and this, they supposed, would be ensured if they could keep a cuckoo with them. No winter could interfere with the warmth and brightness so long as the note of the cuckoo could be heard.

CHAPTER XVII

ETYMOLOGY OF "CUCKOO PEN"

It remains to inquire what is the connection between the spots which bear the name of Cuckoo Pen and the familiar story which we have in the Gotham Tales. It is most improbable that these spots had first come to be called Cuckoo Pens, and that the fable of the cuckoo-penning grew up out of that designation. Indeed such a theory becomes impossible if the statement is correct, as reported by a writer in *Old Nottinghamshire*, that the tale of penning the cuckoo, as well as those of rolling the cheese, raking the pond for the moon, and drowning the eel, is found in Germany, Sweden, Denmark, and Norway. Moreover, there can be no doubt that the fable is far older, as well as far more widespread, than this local term Cuckoo Pen. Nor on the other hand can we suppose that familiarity with the fable led the villagers in so many different places to fix the title of Cuckoo Pen upon these sites, more especially when it so happens that these are nearly always, if not invariably, sites which bear traces of the Briton. Thus we may safely conclude that neither can the fable have given birth to the term Cuckoo Pen nor can the term have given birth to

the fable. Yet it is obvious that there is a connection between them; and we can only assume that the two things were growing side by side and the one influenced the other. The most reasonable explanation would be that these spots which the Briton had occupied were acquiring their peculiar title by some process which was helped forward by the wide currency of the fable. The whole matter is explained if Cuckoo Pen can be shown to be an outgrowth, by corruption or development or otherwise, of some previously existing name.

It will be well to examine first the meaning of the "pen" with which the name of the cuckoo is associated. In some cases it may be simply the English word, signifying an enclosure. But certainly in most cases, and perhaps in all, it is the British word meaning the head or summit of the ground. Penn in the neighbourhood of the Cuckoo Pens,—famous as giving its name to the family from which William Penn the founder of Pennsylvania sprang,—is the highest point of the Buckinghamshire Chilterns; and though some authorities interpret it as a Saxon enclosure it is usually and much more naturally taken to be a British hill-top. Inkpen Beacon, again, on the southern edge of Berkshire, rises upwards of a thousand feet above the Kennet Valley and is reputed to be the highest point of all the chalk range in the south of England. We have already had occasion to allude to the Pens of Somerset and also to Pen-y-ghent among the Craven Hills. The word is met with throughout England and especially along

the western parts, and it occurs perpetually in Wales and Cornwall; while, as Isaac Taylor reminds us, in many of the highest Pyrenean mountains the topmost point is called the *penne*, and a rock is *peña* in Spanish, and a mountain-top is *penna* in Italian, and the same root appears in the Pennine Range of the Alps and in the Apennines. Pen therefore is the British term for the head, appearing constantly in all the countries where the Cymric race has left its mark, and appearing again in the Gadhelic form of Ben in the north of Scotland, and also occasionally in the other Gadhelic form of Ken throughout the British Isles; Kent itself, the foremost headland of these islands, being according to some etymologists the most prominent example of it. As the Saxon adopted the British word *cwm* or *combe* into his language, and adopted also from the Britons the Latin words *castor* or *chester* and *street* which the Romans had given them, he might naturally adopt also the British word *pen.* And accordingly we find that in the Chilterns the spots called Cuckoo Pens occupy as a general rule the summit of a hill, just as Penn Beacon is the summit of the whole range; and where such spots occur on any lower ground they are commonly upon its highest point. In the exceptional cases where this is otherwise it is easy to conjecture explanations. A mound or tumulus, for example, though raised on low ground, may have come to be called a pen or head. And we have seen the example at Benson, where the name of Cuckoo Pen has been lost from the more elevated ground to

which it was applied within living memory, and has clung to a strip of meadow-land in the adjacent hollow.

Now when we find that in or near the district where the Cuckoo Pens abound we have also the place-names Cookley, Cookham, Cuxham (pronounced Cooks-ham), and various others with the same first syllable, and when in all such cases there is sufficient ground for believing that the place was occupied by the Briton, it is evident that other spots with which memories of the Briton were connected may very naturally have been called Cookpen. It will be useful, therefore, to note the characteristics of the places which bear such names.

Cuxham—the *Cuchesham* of the Domesday Survey—lies on a brook in the hollow of an outlying ridge through which an ancient trackway from Dorchester and the ford under Sinodun Hill passes into the Chiltern district. The sheltered hollow, the track-way, and the brook form a combination which would obviously invite the earliest settlers. This is the same track-way that we have noted close beneath the little eminence of the Cuckoo Pen at Warborough, and it ascends the hills midway between those of Shirburn and Swyncombe. Within a mile of the Swyncombe Cuckoo Pen, and close to the line of earthworks which has been described as connected with it, we have Cookley Green, at the point where another track-way from the valley crosses that which follows the ridge of the hills, and where therefore we might again expect to find an early settlement.

Passing on along the same track we come to Cockslease farm at the corner of Stonor Park.

Again a few miles farther eastward an ancient road passing out of Berkshire crossed the river at Cookham into the Chiltern district of Buckinghamshire, ascending by Cliveden Hill, as noted in a previous chapter. Cookham was written "Cocheham" in Domesday Book and "Cocham" in the thirteenth century; afterwards "Cokham" and "Cokeham." Its ancient importance is shown in the fact that a Saxon gemot was held here at the close of the tenth century, and there was a church before the Norman Conquest, as mentioned in the great Survey. We have already seen that the skeletons and weapons dug out of the river here indicated a spot of considerable British resistance. Recently also several oaken piles of an early pile-dwelling have been found at the river's edge beside the lock, and a similar discovery has been made on the opposite side of the river at Hedsor. From an account of the "Place and Field Names" of the parish of Cookham, compiled by the late Mr. Stephen Darby, we get abundant illustrations of the first syllable of the name. Of these the most important is Coxborrow or Coxburh, sometimes known as Coxbur and sometimes miswritten Cockspur. Here from time immemorial the village pound has stood. It is an ancient enclosure close to the ancient roadway and adjoining Ham Field, which is doubtless the sight of the original "ham" or hamlet of Cookham and part of which was formerly Eldfield.

Very fine spear-heads and other flint implements have been found on this ground. In the bend of the river north of the village we have Cockmarsh Common, on which are several barrows; and in the largest of these were flint scrapers and flakes with the cremated remains of a British lady, and in another those of a child, while a third contained a Saxon burial. On Cockmarsh Hill there is also Cockden Grove; and the Court Rolls of the manor mention Cokdonsee, which we may presume to be an *ey* or eyot pertaining to Cockden. Cogwell (or Cokwell) Fishery, too, surrounds Cockmarsh Common, extending up the river all the way from Cookham village to Salisbury in Bishopswood which marks the end of the parish. Cogwell Fishery belonged to the royal manor of Cookham, and in order to safeguard its rights the parish includes a strip of ground on the Buckinghamshire side of the river along the parishes of Little Marlow and Wooburn. All this series of names—Coch-ham, Coxburh, Cockmarsh, Cockden, Cokwell—serves to show how strongly this word *coch* or *cook* had established itself upon the lands which eventually became the parish of Cookham. And it is worth adding that the primitive roadway which passes from west to east through Cookham is crossed at Coxborrow by another from north to south; and a little farther south, in the adjoining parish of Bray, where this latter track crosses the Roman road leading over the river at Bray or Bibracte, we find Cox Green; just as we have already noted Cookley

Green at a similar crossing on the western brow of the Chilterns.

Then if we pass to the opposite end of Berkshire there are the two parishes of Coxwell, Great and Little, known in Domesday Book as Cocheswelle. The well rising between them is a feeder of the Cole which divides Berkshire from Wiltshire and flows northward to join the Thames at Lechlade. At Badbury Hill near Great Coxwell is a circular camp described as being two hundred yards in diameter and surrounded by a ditch ten yards wide. At Little Coxwell also the remains of a square camp doubly entrenched have been noted; and near the village are the Coles Pits, covering an area of fourteen acres and described by Lysons as two hundred and seventy-three pits, for the most part circular, excavated in the sand and varying in depth generally from seven feet to twenty-two feet, one of them being forty feet in diameter; and antiquaries have disputed whether they were dug for habitations and hiding-places or for storing corn. The pits apparently take their name, like the neighbouring parish of Coleshill, from the River Cole.

Further, crossing the Thames again to the Oxfordshire side, we have on the banks of the Windrush the village of Coggs,—the "Coges" which the Bishop of Bayeux owned in Domesday Book. Its name is usually derived from the word *cock*, a little boat, which we met with in Shakespeare. So in *King Lear:*

> "The fishermen that walk upon the beach
> Appear like mice, and yon tall anchoring bark
> Diminished to her cock, her cock a buoy
> Almost too small for sight."

It is recorded that small boats on the Humber and the Ouse were called cocks in the seventeenth century; and Carew's *Survey of Cornwall*, of the same period, speaks of "all sized cocks, barges, and fisherboats hovering on the coast." The word survives among us in the term "cock-boat," as also in the Italian "cocca" and "cocchetta." In the fifteenth century "cok-bote" was often written "cog-bote"; and among six vessels which Sir John Fastolf of Caister Castle had licence to keep in his service for carriage of goods between Yarmouth and London in 1443, one is called a "cogship." Since therefore the land about Coggs is very liable to be flooded, and it is probable that the village would often be accessible only by boats, it is thought to have acquired this name. Yet even under these circumstances it is most unlikely that a village would ever be called "boats." It is much more probable that this is another instance of the word which we have been noticing and that Coggs is the coch's or cog's village. For it appears to be an older settlement in contrast with Newland which forms part of the same parish, and also with the contiguous town of Witney,—Witenie in Domesday—the Witan-ey or Isle of the Witan. Though it does not appear that any discovery of British relics has been recorded here, yet High Coggs runs up the rising ground to Woodley's Copse with its ancient camp in the parish

of Eynsham where the important British settlement was one of the four towns which yielded to Cuthwulf the Saxon after his famous victory in 571. Moreover three miles farther down the Windrush we come to Cokethorpe Park, otherwise called Cockthrop, its name suggesting that it is a "thorpe" or village of Norse immigrants connected with the neighbouring "coch" village. The hamlet adjoining the park is Hardwick, a British "wick" where a cinerary urn has been unearthed in digging gravel. Half a mile farther, in the parish of Standlake, are the remains of a remarkable British village with circular pit-dwellings and underground storehouses for grain, as well as relics of primitive burials, flint and bronze implements, and bones of the extinct short-horned ox.

Cuckfield in Sussex, with its weird legend of the Doom Tree always shedding a bough as a warning of approaching death to the head of the family of Cuckfield Place—the Rookwood Hall of Ainsworth's romance—may be presumed to be an early clearing made by the Briton in the Andredsweald.

It would be easy to go on enumerating similar examples of places which have this *coch* syllable in their names and which also show evidence of British occupation. But one that must not be passed over is Coggeshall, which has the reputation of being the Gotham of Essex, and Fuller in his *Worthies* speaks of it as being called "Jeering Coxall." Its people are said to have fixed hurdles in the bed of the river to divert its course, and hung blankets across the

road to prevent the approach of a pestilence, and pulled down one of their windmills because there was not enough wind for two, and chained up a wheelbarrow lest it should go mad after a mad dog had bitten it; a fisherman among them took rod and line to hook the moon out of the river; and it was necessary for the Volunteers to have their right legs swathed with hay-bands and their left with straw because the serjeant's orders of "right" and "left" were unintelligible to them. "A Coggeshall job" is a proverbial expression in Essex for any remarkably foolish action. It was a site of Roman-British occupation. In Wright's *History and Topography of Essex* we read of various relics found in and about the town,—"a phial with a lamp in it, covered with a Roman tile fourteen inches in diameter, and also some urns with ashes and bones," and coins of the time of Antoninus. It has been thought to be the Canonium of the Itinerary of Antoninus. In the eleventh century it was known as "Coggashael," which suggests the thought that Cogga may have been a personal name; and some have derived the name from a Roman called Coccilus whose inscribed burial-urn of the colour of coral was among the relics found here. There were antiquaries of former times who explained Coggeshall to mean "Sunny Bank," from its position on a southward slope, though an important part of it lies low upon the Blackwater. But other old forms of the name are Cogeshale, Cokkishall, Coxhall; and it may well be another example of the word *cog* or *coch* which we are investigating.

All the facts which we have had before us point the way to a reasonable conjecture that where a spot is now known as Cuckoo Pen it was originally Cuck Pen; in other words, the same causes which made a ham, a burh, a thorp, a lea, a marsh, or a well, to be called Cookham, Cocksburh, Cokethorp, Cookley, Cockmarsh, Coxwell, might equally cause a "pen" to be called Cookpen; and this is the more probable since we have the same ample reasons for connecting the pen with the Briton as we have in the other instances.

Lastly, we have the well-known Cockpen itself, retaining its name unaltered. It is made famous by Lady Nairne's ballad of the early years of the nineteenth century, *The Laird of Cockpen.* Its old mansion is built on a romantic spot of the carboniferous rocks near the South Esk River, a furlong from Dalhousie Castle and seven miles from the Saxon fortress of Edinburgh. It has not lost its old-world aspect, though stone-quarries in the surface of the rocks and coal-workings below, a powder-factory, a paper-mill, and a railway-station, have encroached in modern times very near to its solitude. But we need not hesitate to assume that it was one of the sites where the dispossessed race continued to hold their own.

The transition from Cookpen to Cuckoo Pen would be a very simple one, for it would merely be the addition of another piece of folklore to what was already current about the bird, and thus it would readily gain acceptance. When in the changes of

language Cookpen had become meaningless, the term might easily suggest the thought of the cuckoo being penned, even if the popular myth had not been already in existence to add force to the suggestion.

There is a very curious survival of the term Cuckoo Pen on the borderland of Shropshire and Flintshire, which must not be passed over and may best be noticed here. Footpath gates that swing in a semicircle of paling are known as Cuckoo Pens. If we may assume the probability that the term in this district bore originally the same meaning that belonged to it in the midland district, it is not difficult to conjecture how this odd application of it may have come about. The tracks leading to the British sites would be known as Cuckoo Pen ways; and as these would in many cases merely survive as footpaths, and as the gates of the form which has been described became the local fashion on footpaths, it would be natural to infer that the "pen" meant the semicircular fence, resembling the hurdles of a cattle pen. Then the meaningless cuckoo prefix, which had belonged to the "pen" or high ground, would still cling to the "pen," or gate-fence, and finally would cease to be applied to gates of any different form.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE CUCKING FOLK

ADMITTING, then, the probability or at least the possibility that Cuckoo Pen may be really Cuckpen, what interpretation are we to give to this word *cuck*, *cock*, *coke*, *cog*, *coch*, which we find entering so frequently into the names of sites of British occupation? In some cases it may perhaps be the British *coch* or *goch*, still used in the Welsh language to signify "red"; for the cock, says Isaac Taylor, is the "red" bird; and for its appearance in place-names the same authority instances "Crib Goch, the name of the striking peak which overhangs the pass of Llanberis." Castle Coch, too, is the Norman fortress which the late Marquis of Bute renovated, standing on a wooded hillside near Cardiff. There are place-names also in which this syllable *cock* is believed to indicate a spot where cock-fighting was practised. In other cases it is merely the name of a former owner, as in Cock's Farm at Cookham. But neither of these last can apply to very ancient place-names, and there are numerous instances which refuse to admit of any of these explanations, especially when we have such a group of *coch*-names as that in the parish of Cookham.

We arrive at the most probable interpretation of these names if we take *coch* to be the same word that we have in the term "cuck-stool"; for this, rather than "cucking stool," is (according to Wright's *English Dialect Dictionary*) the correct and original form. The meaning is the "scolds' stool." Dr. Johnson tells us that it was "an engine invented for the punishment of scolds and unquiet women, which in ancient times was called tumbrel"; though in fact it seems that the tumbrel was the entire piece of machinery, for which other terms were tribuch, trebucket, and thew, and a dung-cart was sometimes called a tumbrel; whereas the cuck-stool was the chair fixed upon one end of it, in which the offender was fastened and so ducked in water. Thus at a court of the manor of Edgeware in the year 1552, quoted in Lyson's *Environs of London*, "the inhabitants were presented for not having a Tumbrel and Cucking Stool." Gay, in his Pastorals, represents Sparabilla contemplating suicide and exclaiming:

> "I'll speed me to the pond where the high stool
> On the long plank hangs o'er the muddy pool,
> That stool, the dread of ev'ry scolding quean:
> Yet—sure a lover should not die so mean."

It was also used from a very early period for the punishment of persons who transgressed the laws of assize, especially brewers and bakers, and is mentioned thus in the account of Chester in Domesday Book, though in later times it seems to have been continued only for scolds and disreputable women. Its use is recorded at Manchester as late

as 1775 and at Gainsborough till after 1790. A description of its use at Cambridge in the middle of the eighteenth century is quoted from Cole's manuscripts. He describes the chair as being well painted and gilded, and having its back panel carved with figures of devils laying hold of scolds: it was upon the timber bridge which then existed, before the stone bridge was built, close to Magdalen College: and there he had himself "seen a woman ducked for scolding: the chair hung by a pulley fastened to a beam about the middle of the bridge, in which the woman was confined, and let down under the water three times and then taken out."

A few illustrations of the different forms of the name may be given, taken from the *New English Dictionary* and elsewhere. As early as the first years of the thirteenth century we find it latinised as "cuckestola." A poem of the time of Edward II. speaks of "the pelery [pillory] and the cok-stol," and in the Burgh Laws of Scotland of about the year 1400 we read: "Gif scho [she] makis evil ale scho sall gif viijs. or be put on the kukstule." The Leet-book of Coventry in 1423 mentions the "Cokestowle made upon Chelsmore Grene to punysche skolders and chidders as the law will." In some public accounts at Lichfield in 1578 there is a charge "for making a cuckstool with appurtenances, 8s." Fletcher, in the *Woman's Prize*, 1625, writes: "We'll ship 'em out in cuckstools: there they'll sail . . . till they discover the happy lands of obedience." And in Macclesfield a street is still called Cuckstool Pit

Hill. But we get the form "cucking stool" also as early as some poems of Edward the Second's time: "The pilory and the cucking stol beth i-mad for noht": "Beth i-war of the coking-stole, the lak is dep and hori." An Act of Parliament of the reign of Henry VIII. makes provision for offenders "to be sett up on the pillorie or the cukkyngstole." At Canuden in Essex an inquisition of the tenth year of Elizabeth shows that "Cukingstole Croft" had been given for the maintenance of a light in the Church. Borlase, in his *Natural History of Cornwall* in 1768, relates that "Brawling women undergo the punishment of the Coking stole." It appears that as early as the time of King Henry II. the stool at Montgomery was known as "le Goging Stole"; and at Cirencester at a later date it was the "Gong stool" or "Gonging stool," the stream in which the punishment was inflicted being Gunstoole River. But the commonest form of the name is Cucking Stool. So we have it in Butler's *Hudibras;* and so Sir Walter Scott gives it in *The Betrothed*,—"Beware the cucking-stool, Dame Scant o' grace!"

The meaning of the word has been so completely lost that some have supposed it to be "choking stool," from the idea of the victim being choked in the muddy water. Others have taken it to be a corruption of "ducking stool," which is plainly impossible, though it certainly was a ducking stool and has been frequently called by that name. Thus Dr. Johnson remarks to his Quaker friend, Mrs. Knowles: "We have different modes of restraining

evil: stocks for the men, a ducking stool for women, and a pound for beasts." In 1669 the corporation of Shrewsbury ordered that "a Ducking-stool be erected for the punishment of all scolds." Instances also are quoted by Brand from the Proceedings of the Vice-Chancellor's Court at Cambridge, in the first year of Elizabeth, of women "adjudged to the Duckinge Stoole for scoulding." But we have the true account in Blackstone's *Commentaries*, where he tells us that the "cucking stool is frequently corrupted into ducking stool."

It appears from Wright's Dictionary that the verb *to cuck* is still in use in some parts of England—Northumberland and Warwickshire being mentioned—in the sense of "to make the note of the cuckoo." We have already noted the Northumbrian rhyme which says, "The cuckoo comes of mid-March and cucks of mid-Aperill." The word was also used formerly in the sense of ducking, or punishing with the cuck stool; as in the record of the Court Leet of Manchester in 1648 a woman is described as "a common scould" who "should have bene cuckt": but obviously this is merely a derived sense of the word when its use was unknown except in the term "cuck-stool." It seems clear that the word meant, in its true and fundamental sense, *to scold*, or to make unintelligible sounds, such as a foreign language would be to people of another language. Thus it came to be used in a general way as a term of contempt; and we can hardly doubt that the use of the word cuckoo with that

meaning is to be closely connected with it. We seem to have this secondary sense of the same word in the middle-English *cokes*, a simpleton, which is also applied to a spoilt child, whence we get the verb *to coax*. The term "cockney," or "cokeney" in its older form, has been supposed to be derived from it; and though the latest authorities maintain that this is nothing else than the old word *coken-ay*, a "cock's egg"—a term applied to small yolkless eggs—yet it is difficult to suppose that the word cockney can have obtained its popular prevalence without a connection, real or imagined, with some more familiar word, especially as it comes so near to the meaning of *cokes*, a simpleton. Shakespeare uses the word vaguely for a fool, and not specially for one who is born within the sound of Bow Bells. "I am afraid," he says, "this great lubber, the world, will prove a cockney." Another though less familar word which may be supposed to have been influenced in a similar way is "Cockaigne." It is simply an old French word meaning "abundance" and connected with *coquo* and cook; and a French poem of the thirteenth century, entitled "Pays de Cocagne," describes it as a country of luxury and idleness where geese fly about offering themselves to be eaten. But the "Land of Cockaygne" came to be synonymous with the land of simpletons, or lubber-land.

The verb *to cuck*, therefore, seems to have been originally used more or less contemptuously for the utterance of unintelligible sounds. So to the

ears of the English a Briton—a "Welshman" or foreign man, as they called him—would merely "cuck" when he spoke, and his race would be called the cuck-folk. Thus also his home would be the cuck-ham or cucks-ham, and the various spots that he occupied would be cuck-field, cuck-ley, cuck-dene, cuck-marsh, cucks-green, cucks-well; and the point of vantage-ground which he specially made his own would be in the Saxon's proper tongue cucks-burh, or if he preferred to use the Briton's own term it would be cuck-pen. Thus the spot where the Welsh were defeated *æt Peonnum*, "at the Pens," may well have been known as "cuck-pens" to the invading Saxon, though the term has not clung to the spot. And here, as in other places to which the fable of penning the cuckoo has become attached, in Warwickshire, Monmouthshire, Northumberland and elsewhere, the term "cuck-pen" may well have existed and been lost, while in the Oxfordshire district it was preserved in the corrupt form of "Cuckoo Pen." The Cuckoo Bush at Gotham has all the characteristics of the Cuckoo Pens of Oxfordshire except the name; and we are reminded of them also in the story of the Coves of Lorbottle making their wall round a particular plantation which the cuckoo was accustomed to occupy.

It is obvious that the true "cuck-penners" are those who occupied the cuck-pen; for the localities which are ridiculed thus are those in which the older race predominated, and the neighbours who make the jest against them are the Saxons; just as the men of

Somerset, which preserved its British independence to a later period, would be called the Cuck-penners by the Saxons of Wiltshire. Then, when the true meaning of the words *cuck* and *pen* was lost, the old fable of penning the cuckoo was attached to these people as an afterthought; and thus eventually the cuckoo-penners were no longer those who occupied, but those who pent others in, a cuckoo pen.

Some other varieties of the myth, similar to that of the owl at Holt in Norfolk, must be noticed in conclusion. We have found the Wiltshire folk ridiculing their western neighbours for penning the cuckoo, while their own British remnant are mocked by the Saxon conqueror as the men who raked the moon. At the eastern end of Wiltshire the bird-penning story comes up in a different form. Be it noted that here is the extension of the same range of chalk hills which runs on through Berkshire from the Chilterns, and the same ancient trackway is continued along the ridge. Nowhere have the primitive inhabitants of our land left more notable remains than in the cromlechs and earthworks which are freely scattered among the uplands of Wiltshire, Stonehenge and Avebury being only the most remarkable among many. The village of Aldbourne lies in a hollow on the southern front of the downs, some four miles from the point where the Ridgeway passes into this county out of Berkshire. It is in a fork of the Ermin Way; for here the great Roman road passing from Silchester and Speen to Cirencester and Gloucester throws off a branch westward.

Three miles farther southward in the valley, where the "ald burn" falls into the Kennet river, is Ramsbury, the "Raven's beorgh," the seat of a Saxon bishopric. The Saxon of Ramsbury twits the Celt of Aldbourne for fencing round his pond in order to "coop up the dab-chick," or moor-fowl.

We may compare also a legend of St. Neot's in Cornwall. The Saint, coming there as a hermit, was harassed by various hindrances in building his church. Thieves stole his oxen by night; but the red-deer from the forest came and offered themselves in their place, and St. Neot harnessed them to his carts and made them draw the stones for the building. The crows also annoyed him in his work; and the country-folk point out an entrenched enclosure in which he impounded them. It is a Roman camp, which was doubtless used by the Britons after the departure of the Romans. The Saint was a Saxon—a kinsman, and by one account a brother, of King Alfred—and thus was regarded as an intruder among the Celts of Cornwall, whom the legend transforms into crows. Whether the quarrel of the Cornishmen with the defenceless hermit was one of religious controversy or of racial enmity does not appear, but the thought arises that some older myth may have been engrafted upon St. Neot's history by a later age.

The crow is certainly an uncanny bird, if only by reason of his blackness. "The curse o' the crows on you!" says an Irish proverb. And still more uncanny is the owl.

"Birds of omen dark and foul,
Night-crow, raven, bat and owl,"

sings "an ancient Gaelic melody" in the *Legend of Montrose.* It is true that the owl is the bird of wisdom, sacred to Minerva. As Longfellow describes him in *Hyperion*, "The owl is a grave bird,—a monk, who chants midnight mass in the great temple of Nature." But there is also the Lich-owl, or corpse-owl, defined by Dr. Johnson in his Dictionary as "a sort of owl by the vulgar supposed to foretel death." If he is heard at a birth his note is the foreteller of misfortune. His feathers, according to Horace, were used together with frog's blood by the witch Canidia in her incantations; and

"Adder's fork and blind worm's sting,
Lizard's leg and owlet's wing
For a charm,"

were familiar to the witches in *Macbeth.* And there is the strange tale which the country-folk of Gloucestershire used to tell,—how the Saviour went into a baker's shop and asked for bread, and the baker's wife at once put a piece of dough into the oven to bake, but her daughter complained that it was too large and took part of it back, whereupon she was transformed into an owl. Ophelia in *Hamlet*, distracted with her woes, takes the story to herself: "They say, the owl was a baker's daughter." And Mr. Leland, in his book on "The English Gipsies and their Language," says that they are familiar with this legend and that *Maromengro's Chavi*, or Baker's Daughter is their common term

for an owlet. Whatever lies behind it, the owl here stands out clearly as a bird of evil omen.

The dab-chick, too, has gained a doubtful reputation by its habit of disappearing with strange suddenness in the water. In Stirlingshire it is called the "Mother o' the Mawkins," or the hares,—in other words, a witch. But the tales that we have been noticing cannot be accounted for as the outgrowth from fancies of this kind. We may fairly assume that all of them are connected together in their origin; and if this is the case, it is evident that when the bird is the impounded crow or the enclosed owl or the cooped dab-chick, these are merely variations of the tale of the pent cuckoo.

Then if this widespread tale is to be connected, at least in many cases, with a spot called "Cookpen," parallel explanations may suggest themselves for the kindred stories. May not the Cornish story of the crows at St. Neot's have grown from some designation of the spot which had become corrupted into "crow-pen"? Several etymologies, more or less likely, suggest themselves. Instances are cited in which the Celtic *craig*, *crick*, or *carrick*, a rock, takes the form of *crau*. So crow-pen may be "rock-head." And Wright's *English Dialect Dictionary* gives us an early Welsh and Cornish word, taking the forms *crew*, *craw*, *croo*, *crow*, *crue*, *krowe*, meaning a pen or fold for cattle or sheep. So crow-pen may be a fold on a hill-top. Again, Professor Skeat tells us of middle-English words *crauand*, *creaunt*, *recreaunt*, meaning "defeated," and surviving in our

words "craven" and "recreant." It has been argued that at the root of these lies an old noun *crau* which enters into several of our place-names. So crow pen would be the hill-top of defeat. It happens remarkably that a large number of names in which this *crau* or *crow* forms the initial syllable belong to places where the Briton is to be found. Crow Wood Mot at Gotham in Nottinghamshire has already been mentioned. On the Roman road that runs from Silchester by Staines to London, known locally as the Devil's Highway, is the village of Crowthorne, in the parish of Sandhurst, which includes Wellington College and Broadmoor Asylum. It has been said that the name is purely modern,—invented, in fact, by the rector of Sandhurst when the village was being built and a name was wanted. But there was already a single cottage on the heath, and the spot on which this stood had always been Crowthorne. It is at the point at which an old road crosses southward to Edgeburrow Hill, and here the Devil's Highway itself approaches the British earthwork known as Cæsar's Camp and the adjacent Wickham Bushes where early remains have been discovered, — a British "wick" which became a Saxon "ham" and afterwards a waste of "bushes." Again, at Crowland or Croyland in Lincolnshire, on an island among the marshes with which King Ethelbald endowed the famous monastery, St. Guthlac in earlier times had made his hermitage to escape the persecutions of the neighbouring Britons, and when he heard rude

noises around his cell at night and feared that his enemies had found him he sought relief in the thought that they were only demons. At Crowborough on the weald of Sussex, famous for its ancient beacon-station eight hundred feet above the sea-level, there can be little doubt that the "beorgh" was a British earthwork. In Somerset we find Crowcombe in a "combe" on the rugged western front of the Quantock Hills. Coming back to the district of Oxfordshire where the Cuckoo Pens abound, closely adjacent to that of Benson is Crowmarsh, the *Craumares* of Domesday Book, which Mr. Reade, the Oxfordshire antiquary who has more than once been quoted, claimed as the site of Aulus Plautius's complete defeat of the fugitive Britons when he had established his position up the Thames. In one instance and another it is possible that such a spot may take its designation from a Saxon owner who bore the name of Crau or Crow, or even from the bird itself; but it cannot be by chance that this word belongs so frequently to localities which connect themselves closely with the Briton, suggesting the strong probability of some more significant meaning.

We might go on to hazard a conjecture about the Owl myth at Holt in Norfolk, only premising that here again it is merely guess-work. But no spot in the neighbourhood could more worthily bear the name of Pen; and if the word be infrequent in the eastern counties, we have at least Pentlow Hill in Essex,—the Celtic *pen* joined with the Saxon *hlaw*.

Then, whether from some Scandinavian hero, as at Burnham Ulph a few miles away, or whether from the bird itself, as in such names as Ulgham (pronounced Uffham) and Hoolet Hall in Northumberland, who knows but this spot among the woods of Holt may once have been called Ulph Pen or Owl Pen? And in that case the puzzle of its quaint myth is disentangled.

And if we should venture upon a further guess about the Aldbourne dab-chick, we might suggest that perhaps a British "pen" of the Wiltshire Downs lies at the foundation of the story, and possibly the idea of a pen for the wild-fowl or the moor-hen may have sprung from such a name as "fowl pen" or "hen pen." If it were the former, we might conjecture that it may have been a "foul pen" in the sense of a "pen" surrounded by foul or marshy ground. Or if it were Hen Pen, then Hen Toe, a corruption of Hen Tor, in Lancashire, affords an exact parallel to the name: and the former syllable is of frequent occurrence;—as, for example, Isaac Taylor says, in his *Words and Places*, that "from the Anglo-Saxon *hean*, poor, we have Henlow, Hendon and Henley"; while again it is one of the forms into which the word *ham* or *home* has in some cases been corrupted, and we have also seen that some antiquaries believe that in Henley there is the Celtic *hen* meaning "old."

Shall we at any rate conclude that the mystery of the imprisoned and escaping bird may probably be solved by the existence of such place-names as have

been suggested; that the prevalence of the Cuckoo myth may be attributed to a great extent to the frequent occurrence of a Cuck-pen transformed into Cuckoo Pen, while conversely this transformation of the name was itself largely due to the prevalence of the myth, the one fact reacting upon the other? And may we not also presume that the other forms of the myth are probably traceable to some corresponding origin? Certainly this explanation accords with the facts which belong to the various localities, and with the fanciful legends and traditions which bear upon them. It may therefore be a suggestion worthy of being considered until learned antiquaries can offer one that is worthier.

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